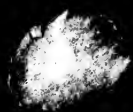


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A PRACTICAL
COMMENTARY ON HOLY SCRIPTURE.
VOL. I.

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A PRACTICAL COMMENTARY
ON
HOLY SCRIPTURE

FOR THE USE OF CATECHISTS AND TEACHERS

BY FREDERICK JUSTUS KNECHT, DD.,
AUXILIARY BISHOP OF THE ARCHDIOCESE OF FREIBURG.

TRANSLATED FROM THE TENTH GERMAN EDITION.

PREFACE BY REV. MICHAEL F. GLANCEY,
INSPECTOR OF SCHOOLS IN THE DIOCESE OF BIRMINGHAM.

WITH THE APPROBATION AND RECOMMENDATION OF HIS EMINENCE THE MOST REV.
CARDINAL-ARCHBISHOP OF WESTMINSTER AND OF THEIR LORDSHIPS THE RIGHT
REV. BISHOPS OF BELLEVILLE AND BIRMINGHAM.

CONTAINING 108 ILLUSTRATIONS AND TWO COLOURED MAPS.

FIRST VOLUME.
THE OLD TESTAMENT.

B. HERDER,
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In these days, when so much is written and spoken that is destructive of faith and of belief in revelation, and when the Sacred Writings themselves are treated with even less respect than profane history, it is important to give to Catholic youth such a work as Dr. KNECHT'S Commentary on the Old and New Testament. The chief value of the work consists in this, that it points out the bearing of Bible History upon faith and morals. To shew in what ways the Inspired Writings are of practical use to Christian life, to mark their application to conduct as they are perused by the youthful reader, is to render a great service to our holy Religion. Dr. KNECHT'S work seems to have attained a considerable success in other lands. I augur for it, therefore, in English-speaking countries at least a hearty welcome.

It is of great importance that Catholics should esteem and love the Holy Scriptures, and should learn to use them aright. We have here before us a valuable aid in this direction.

Herbert Cardinal Vaughan,

Archbishop of Westminster.

June 6. 1894.

Belleville, Ill., April 5. 1894.

DEAR SIR,

The "Commentary on Holy Scripture for the use of Catechists and Teachers" by Dr. F. J. KNECHT, now Auxiliary Bishop of Freiburg, Baden, has been received with the greatest welcome by the Clergy in Germany. It is considered by them as one of the best and most useful works for Catechists and Teachers. I am glad to learn that an English translation of this most excellent work is to be published by you, and I do not hesitate to say that the English edition will become as popular as the original German. It deserves strong recommendation.

Yours faithfully in Christ

† **John Janssen,**
Bishop of Belleville.

St Mary's Seminary, Oscott: Birmingham, March 8. 1894.

I like extremely the Chapters I have read of Dr. KNECHT'S Bible Narrative and Commentary. With an admirable method he combines with the Narrative brief explanatory notes, which he follows up with suitable reflections. To a Catechist in want of a Manual for teaching Bible History this work will be found invaluable.

† **Edward,**
Bishop of Birmingham.

PREFACE.

1.

IN no country, perhaps, has the study of Catechetics made such rapid strides, or its importance been so much appreciated, as in Germany. That country can boast of a band of writers who have enriched the world with a most valuable catechetical literature, treating the subject in a way at once scientific and practical. Gruber, Krawutzcky, Overberg, Barthel, Hirschfelder and Benda are names deservedly honoured by those who can appreciate the importance of Catechetics; but more honourable still are the names of Schuster and Mey, to which must now be added the name of Dr. Knecht, Auxiliary Bishop of the Archdiocese of Freiburg, the author of several pamphlets on state education and the school question, but better known as the author of the *Practical Commentary*, which entitles him to a place in the front rank of Catechists. Besides issuing Catechisms and Histories, these writers have done what in them lay to elevate Catechetics into a science, and to build it up from a solid foundation. They were quick to see that Catechetics is both a science and an art, and that like every other science it must rest on certain broad principles, and move along certain fixed lines. They recognized that Catechisms must be constructed not haphazard, but on a definite plan and principle, and according to rule. Hence, for years past, the principles underlying Catechetics, its various branches—e. g. Bible History and Catechism—and their mutual interdependence, the catechetical method itself—viz. the mode of imparting the several branches, and the rules to be followed by the Catechist—all, in a word, that goes to constitute the science, has passed through the sieve of exhaustive discussion.

And where do we stand in England? Have we advanced thus far? Or have we so much as grasped the truth that Catechetics is a science at all? On looking into the dictionary I found, indeed, the word Catechetics, but it was marked with an obelus or death-mark, to show that it was either dying or dead. The thing is not, perhaps, quite as lifeless as its name; but if Catechetics, as a science, still barely lives, it is the utmost that can be said. I am far from saying that there is a lack of earnestness amongst us, or that we have no experienced Catechists who have attained a fair, or, if you will, a large measure of success. Nor am I insinuating that we are not alive to the vast consequences with which success or failure in catechizing is fraught for the future. On the contrary, the steady, if slow, growth of a catechetical literature amongst us points to a growing interest in the subject, and a deepening sense of its importance. All this, however, while proving that we are in point of fact catechizing, only serves to bring out in greater prominence the fact that we are still without the science. Are our tools rusty? Are our weapons broken or blunted? In a word, are our methods right or wrong? Are the instruments we are using adapted to the purpose for which they are intended? Are our Catechisms correctly adjusted, that is, are they set in a manner best calculated to secure their aim? All these are questions on which our future success turns, and which clamour for an answer. If our methods and our instruments are perchance wrong, we are but wasting our energies in attempting to naturalize mistakes, by forming them into a regular system. And what answer can be given to these questions? Until lately no answer has been attempted, even if the question has been asked. But recently an enterprising clerical journal, *Pastoralia* by name, has been rife with discussions that have yet only touched the fringe of these great questions; still I am not without hopes that when the mass of nebulous matter condenses, it may prove to be the beginning of a solid catechetical system.

We in England, then, seem to be just entering on the preliminary stage of discussion. In Germany the stage of

discussion has long been passed. And, it will naturally be asked, has the discussion proved as barren of practical fruit as many German discussions have undoubtedly been? What has been the net result? Is any advantage likely to accrue from a discussion? Is not the catechetical system that is stereotyped in practice good enough? These are, I submit, questions that may be profitably discussed, even if the discussion entail no change. At any rate, it can do no harm, if it only strengthen our self-assurance that we are travelling on the right road. For it is not a little singular that the Germans, who have discussed these matters, and we, who have not, move in many respects on totally distinct planes. The Germans, for instance, use a graduated series of Catechisms. There are lower Catechisms, middle Catechisms, and upper Catechisms. In England, on the other hand, we have practically but one Catechism, which is learnt alike by infants on the gallery, and by youths in the upper forms. Is it better to have one Catechism or a graduated series adapted to the several capacities of those who use them? * Surely, it would not be futile to discuss the respective merits or demerits of the two systems. For without presuming to say that either is better than the other, I may safely affirm that ours is not so obviously superior as to be outside the pale of discussion.

Another question closely bound up with the former is to determine what should be the setting and frame-work and general characteristics of a Catechism. Should a Catechism, in a word, be a *Summa Theologica* in miniature? a compendium of Theology? a condensed essence of theological treatises? Should it be couched in technical language? Should it bristle with definitions? Should the definitions be framed with such studied accuracy that the most fastidious philosopher shall be unable to detect the slightest flaw or imperfection? Should they be such that "only a philosopher can read them without a groan"? Or should a Catechism be a *religious primer*? Should its language be plain and

* One and the same Catechism might serve for all grades, if it were printed with some distinction analogous to large and small type.

simple, but accurate withal, though without straining after minute shades of accuracy? Should there be more explanations and fewer definitions? By way of illustrating the two methods I will transcribe two answers to the question: What is God? One answer occurs in the English Catechism, the other in Deharbe's Small Catechism, a translation of which is extensively used in the United States.

ENGLISH CATECHISM.

What is God?

God is the supreme Spirit, who alone exists of Himself and is infinite in all perfections.

DEHARBE'S CATECHISM.

What is God?

God is the Lord and Master of Heaven and earth, from Whom all good things come.

The English definition is made up of a number of ideas of such a hard metaphysical cast as to be wholly impervious to the ordinary mind, to say nothing of the child-mind. Nay it may be affirmed without exaggeration that only those who have undergone a philosophical and a theological training can ever hope to understand it. The very explanation involves a course of theology. For the definition is the whole treatise *De Deo* in a nutshell. Deharbe's answer immediately stoops to lowly intelligences, and thereby it stoops to conquer. Being adapted to the capacity of children it will give them, at least, some idea of God, whereas the English definition cannot but leave a blank. And yet, as Frassinetti rightly contends, the first and chiefest step in catechizing is to give children a grand and exalted idea of God. Even the *Middle* Catechisms do not require their pupils to soar to such metaphysical heights as we expect our infants to scale.

To some it will seem that both methods are right, if each be kept in its place: that we need both a digest of theology and a religious primer. At the same time it is respectfully insisted that the two works are so different in scope and material that any attempt to fuse them into one is foredoomed to failure. Surely, all must allow that religious teaching comes first, theological explanation a long way second, and theological terms are to be admitted only when they cannot be kept out.

Thus we have again veered round to the previous question: whether it is better to have one Catechism or several? Those who maintain the necessity of having several Catechisms, or several grades in the one Catechism, can at all events appeal to the example of St. Paul who prescribed milk for the weak and solid food for the strong.

There is yet a third point on which we need light, and that is the disposition and order in which the material should be set. In what order should the Catechism be arranged? On a metaphysical or a practical plan? The order followed in the English Catechism is severely metaphysical, and consequently children do not learn till late many things that they require to know early. Take, for instance, the Sacrament of Penance and the Christian's Daily Exercise. These occur in the latter part of the Catechism. And yet, children require these long before this stage in the Catechism is reached, that is, if the present order be followed. And what is the result? That children have to be learning two parts of the Catechism concurrently: one for school-work, and another to fit them for the Sacraments they are about to receive. Thus the school-work is a drag on the Sacraments, and the Sacraments a drag on the school-work, whereas they should be a mutual help one to the other. A question proper to be discussed in Catechetics is how far this double system is a waste of energy, and how far it would be advantageous to arrange the school Catechism on a more useful principle, that is, broadly speaking, in the order in which it is required*. In the Catechism for the Diocese of Rottenburg, the Sacraments follow immediately on the articles of the Creed. This, at all events, is a step in the right direction. For obviously children receive the Sacraments, and therefore require to know about them, before they need a detailed knowledge of the commandments. But still greater advance has been made in the Diocese of Salford. In the manuals of Religious Instruction used in that diocese, and approved by the present Cardinal Archbishop when Bishop

* Catechisms of this kind are in use in the Dioceses of Birmingham and Salford.

of Salford, the questions and answers are arranged, not in the mechanical order with which we are familiar in the ordinary Catechism, but in *subjects*. Here we have, I submit, a valuable hint which, if judiciously acted upon, cannot but greatly simplify the work of learning and, what is more important, of understanding the Catechism.

The incidental mention of the Catechism for the Diocese of Rottenburg suggests another point—and it shall be the last—on which I wish now to touch. This Catechism has in common with our own one notable feature. Underlying both is the remarkable principle of embodying the question in the answer. When this principle was first introduced into the English Catechism, it was looked upon as the golden key that would unlock the portals of knowledge. It was imagined that the automatic action of dovetailing the question into the answer would serve as a sort of plastic medium for transferring to the mind of the child the connexion between question and answer that exists on paper. The psychic process by which this result was to be achieved was doubtless wrapped in mystery; but as an expedient for bridging over the abyss between mind and matter, the device was certainly ingenious. It looked very plausible, and no one could say that it might not succeed. Its shortlived existence, however, has but confirmed the old axiom that an automaton will never produce life or intelligence. No one nowadays dreams that it has realized the great expectations that were formed from it. Nay, if I may speak as one less wise, I should say that the soundness of the principle is very widely called in question. Instead of smoothing away, as many object, it has multiplied the difficulty of learning the Catechism by increasing the matter of the answers, already in many cases too bulky*; and, what is far worse, by giving such undue prominence to the question, it has

* Bulky not merely in words, but chiefly in ideas. An answer should contain one fact or one idea; not a fact and a reason for the fact; or a fact, and an exception, and a reason for the exception. Questions with a multiplicity of ideas (e. g. What is an Indulgence?), if split up into several, may be made intelligible.

thrust the answer into the background, and thus the answer is smothered or strangled in the question. Now, which is the more important factor in a Catechism: the question or the answer? The answer to this question is too obvious to need stating; for surely there can be no doubt that the answer is of primary, and the question of only secondary importance. The question is of value only inasmuch as it draws out the answer. It is the answer, therefore, that should be to the front, and the question in the background. Whereas when the question is put in front, and the answer in the rear—when the question is made to overshadow the answer—the natural order is inverted.

I have said that the English and Rottenburg Catechisms share this principle in common. But, after all, the agreement between the two Catechisms is only apparent. For there is this difference between the two, that in the English Catechism the question was framed before the answer, whereas in the Rottenburg Catechism the answer was framed before the question. Thus in the latter the true principle appears as a living force.

This is a matter of greater import than at first blush it may seem. Not only is this mode of procedure a courageous assertion of the true principle on which I have been insisting; not only is the true proportion between question and answer thereby observed; but it also gives us a glimpse of yet another truth which we seem barely to have realized: viz. that answers gain in clearness and directness when they are unhampered by the stilted phraseology of a preformed question. How much plainer and simpler would Catechisms be, if all were constructed on this plan! Still, if the Rottenburg principle is right, we may reasonably go a step farther and ask, how far it is advisable to have stereotyped questions at all. Will the Catechism of the future—if Catechism it can be called—, after the manner of that excellent religious primer, *Facts of Faith*, consist merely of sets of plain simple consecutive statements? That some chapters in the Catechism lose in effectiveness by being put in the form of question and answer, is to me painfully evident.

Take, for instance, the last chapter—the Christian's Daily Exercise. Will any one say that the beautiful instructions therein contained would not be far more telling, if written in the form of pithy childlike statements? But, as they stand, they are positively handicapped by the questions to which they form a pendant. And it is to be feared that, in consequence, children often think of the duty inculcated only in connexion with its question in the Catechism.

2.

Leaving the domain of general Catechetics, we now come to that branch which is the subject-matter of the present volume, viz. Bible History. And, first of all, it may be asked: what place does Bible History hold in a course of religious instruction? Bible History is not the foundation on which religious instruction rests, nor the centre round which it revolves, nor the goal towards which it tends. Our religion centres in our faith, which is not a condensed extract from Bible History, but comes from the Church. Not Bible History, then, but the teaching of the Church must, on Catholic principles, be at once the beginning, middle and end of religious instruction. Hence Bible History, to claim a place in religious instruction, must do so only inasmuch as it bears on the doctrines of faith. If this principle be kept steadily in view, Bible History may be made to render most valuable service in religious instruction. The illustrative light it throws on doctrinal truths makes them more easily intelligible. They become invested with a concrete form, are clothed with flesh and blood, breathe the breath of life, and move like living truths before our eyes. In the Catechism, they appear as cold abstracts and mere outlines. Thus Bible History becomes an object-lesson in faith, a veritable pictorial Catechism. How powerfully, for instance, is the truth of an all-ruling Providence illustrated by the histories of Joseph and Abraham! What, again, is better calculated to teach the power of prayer than the stories of Moses praying while the Israelites fought, and of the Church praying for the imprisoned Peter? On the other

hand, the fate of Judas and the rejection of Juda show forth, in all their hideous deformity, the terrible consequences of resistance to grace; while the history of the fall of Eve and of Peter brings out the necessity of avoiding dangerous occasions. In this way, ¹Bible History at once proves and illustrates doctrinal truth. ²And it likewise develops and expands such truth. The Catechism tells us, indeed, how and why Christ suffered, but Bible History gives a full and detailed account of His sufferings, and so enables us better to realize the infinite love of God and the enormity of sin. The texts of Scripture that in the Catechism stand isolated and shorn of their context, are now seen in the light of their surroundings and speak to us with a new force and meaning. ³Moreover, Bible History serves to complete the Catechism. The Catechism, for example, is silent about miracles, about God's mercy and forbearance, His patience and long-suffering. Of humility, and indeed of many other virtues, it is also silent, except that it arranges them over against the opposing vices. But would we learn their nature and properties, and how pleasing they are to God, it is to Bible History that we must turn. The Catechism is monosyllabic in stating the duties that children owe to their parents, masters to their servants, and vice-versa; whereas the history of the centurion's servant, of Heli's sons, and of Tobias surrounds these duties with a halo of interpreting light. Again, ⁴Bible History exhibits religious truth in its bearing and action on the most varied states and conditions. Virtue and vice stand before us, with life-blood coursing through their veins, in attractive beauty or repellent ugliness. The Good Samaritan invites to mercy; Job, in his resignation to God's will, is a beacon-light to the sorrowing; the Apostles going forth from the scourges, and rejoicing that they were accounted worthy to suffer for Christ, invest with a startling reality the beatitude: Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice' sake.

From all this it is clear that Bible History is not to be read, as too often it is, merely as a story-book; that it is to be studied, not on its own account, but because it imparts life and vigour, picturesqueness and comprehensiveness

to religious instruction; because it elucidates, proves, enforces and illustrates the truths that go to make up religious instruction. But, as Dr. Knecht insists, in order that Bible History may be in a position to render these services, it must be "taught in the closest connexion with the Catechism". "Catechism and Bible History must mutually interpenetrate*, for only in this way is a systematic course of religious instruction possible" (p. 9). Catechism and Bible History must go hand in hand, but Catechism must be in the van. Catechism is the guiding principle, and Bible History its handmaid.

These are the principles, weighty though elementary, on which Dr. Knecht and all writers on Catechetics are generally agreed. And how does practice harmonize with principles? Is practice attuned to principle? Or are the two in hopeless discord? To begin with, how many teachers have mastered the reason why Bible History has a place in religious instruction? How many, or how few, realize the fact that Bible History and Catechism should be "taught in the closest connexion"? And what percentage of those who have grasped this truth put it in practice? There is no denying the patent fact that, as a rule, the two are not taught concurrently, and are not made to run on parallel lines. Ten to one, the Bible History set down for a class in a given year has no connexion whatever with the doctrinal instruction of that year. Thus, while children are being instructed in the Holy Eucharist, their Scripture History turns on that singularly uninspiring period embraced by the reigns of the kings of Israel and Juda! All this comes from being enslaved to the chronological system. This is the root of the evil to which the axe must be laid. Forgetting the plain principle that should underly the teaching of all Bible History, and utterly ignoring the profit or loss to the children, we have stumbled over the crooked idea that Bible History must be taught chronologically even in our poor schools. I am far from denying, nay, I affirm that a systematic course of Bible History should be given when time and facilities are not wanting, as in our upper schools and

* "In inniger gegenseitiger Durchdringung".

colleges. But in our poor schools, where the time barely suffices to give the necessary instruction and to drive it home with religious effect, a slavish adhesion to chronology is to sacrifice realities to figures. To talk of a systematic course in this sense, under such circumstances, is nothing short of preposterous. In the chronological system, Bible History cannot, except by a happy accident, enforce and illustrate the religious instruction. Far from being a help, it is a drawback. Instead of elucidating, it obscures. No longer the handmaid, it seeks to be on an equality with the mistress. For religious instruction to succeed in its great purpose it must, as Dr. Knecht rightly says, be conducted on a "unitive" plan. The unit is the doctrinal instruction, with which the Bible History must be brought into line, unless we are to fly in the teeth of all our principles. Let me now briefly illustrate what I mean by this unification or concentration of subject that I am advocating, lest perhaps I be twitted with pulling down without attempting to build up. Instead, therefore, of teaching children who are being instructed in the Blessed Eucharist about the kings of Israel and Juda, I would teach them the Scripture History of the Blessed Eucharist, as in the following plan*:

THE HOLY EUCHARIST.

- I. Types of the Holy Eucharist:
 1. The Sacrifice of Melchisedech.
 2. The Paschal Lamb.
 3. The Manna.
 4. The Food of Elias.
 5. The Jewish Sacrifices.
- II. The Prophecy of Malachias.
- III. Christ promises a new Sacrifice:
 1. At Jacob's Well,
 2. After the multiplication of the loaves.
- IV. The Last Supper.—Institution of the Blessed Eucharist.
- V. The two disciples going to Emmaus.

* From *Scripture History for Schools* (No. 3). Approved for use in the Diocese of Birmingham.

VI. Miracles illustrative of the Blessed Eucharist:

1. Water made wine at Cana.
2. Multiplication of loaves.
3. Christ walking on the waters.
4. The Transfiguration.

The important subject of the Church may be treated somewhat similarly.

THE CHURCH.

PART I. The Old Testament.

- I. Introductory.
- II. The Church a Family.
 1. Noe. The Ark.
 2. Call of Abraham.—The promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- III. The Church a People.
 1. Moses.
 2. Giving of the Law.
 3. The Tabernacle.
 4. Entrance into Promised Land.
- IV. The Church a Kingdom.
 1. David.
 2. Solomon.—Building of the Temple.
 3. The kingdom broken up.
- V. God promises to set up a New Kingdom.

PART II. The Gospels.

- VI. Introductory.
- VII. Christ the King.—The Kingdom of God.
- VIII. Parables on the Kingdom of God.
 1. The Hidden Treasure.
 2. The Pearl of Great Price.
 3. The Wheat and the Cockle.
 4. The Drag-net.
 5. The Leaven.
 6. The Mustard Seed.
 7. The Good Shepherd.
- IX. Jesus calls Disciples.
 - X. The first Miraculous Draught of Fishes.
- XI. Peter's Confession of Faith.—The Foundation of the Church of Christ.
- XII. Christ promises that Peter's faith shall not fail.
- XIII. The second miraculous Draught of Fishes.—Christ makes Peter Chief Shepherd.
- XIV. The Mission of the Apostles.

PART III. History of the Church after our Lord's Ascension.

- XV. The Opening of the Church.
- XVI. Peter cures the Lame Man.
- XVII. The First Christians.
- XVIII. The Apostles work miracles; are imprisoned etc.
- XIX. Conversion of St. Paul.
- XX. Peter visits the Churches.
- XXI. Peter's vision.—Cornelius.
- XXII. Peter imprisoned and set free by angel.
- XXIII. The Council of Jerusalem.
- XXIV. Primacy of St. Peter.—Summary.

In a word, the Scripture History should be grouped round the central doctrines of our faith.

3.

A subject largely discussed in Catechetics is the *method* of teaching Bible History. Catechists are now agreed that five factors go to make up the teaching of Bible History: 1. Narrative, 2. explanation, 3. repetition, 4. commentary, 5. application. Not to be needlessly prolix, I assume that this is also the order in which they are to be taken. A few words must be said on each.

Narrative. The first stage in teaching Bible History is the narrative. The teacher *tells* the story briefly and pithily, in such a way, however, as to make the actors stand out as living beings, and enable the children to see with their eyes and hear with their ears what is said and done. This is what Fénelon called the "fundamental law" in teaching Bible History. Neglect or slipshod observance of this rule is prolific in failures. And yet, in defiance of this "fundamental law", children are often set to learn the History *in the first instance* from a book! What is the result? The child, failing to understand the story aright at the outset, receives a blurred impression which is never wholly effaced. And no wonder. The negative was bad; and no amount of subsequent dilutions and retouchings will produce a good photograph from a bad negative. It is essential that the first impression should be a good one. If the child fails at first to catch the points of interest, it is bored by the story

ever afterwards. But if the story is well told, the child's interest is awakened, and it is all ears to know something further. The narrative is the peg on which all that follows is to hang. Unless the nail be firmly driven in, it will not hold the picture; so unless the points of the story are clearly fixed in the child's mind, it is labour wasted to overlay it with explanations or to attach pendant commentaries.

Explanation. A story well told is half explained. In telling the story, hard words are, as far as possible, to be avoided; but from time to time, words and phrases, usages and customs that need explaining, will find their way into the story. This is all that Catechists mean by the explanation, viz., making clear all that is absolutely necessary for understanding the story aright. It does not mean branching off into learned digressions, or talking over the children's heads. All vapid display of learning confuses rather than explains.

Repetition. So far books have been on the shelf. And sometimes they remain there much longer. Some teachers, taking their stand on high principles, rise to heights of virtuous indignation in denouncing all employment of Bible Histories as pernicious. Books, they say, degrade the learning of Bible History to the clumsiest mechanical operation, and deal a death-blow at intelligence. But surely this denunciation proceeds from a wrong conception of the time and place when books are to be used. If the children are made to learn the history in the first instance from a book, undoubtedly the objection has some force. Then, however, not books but wrong methods are to blame. How can the book rightly used be fatal to intelligence, since intelligence has been brought into play before the book is used at all? For surely it is bringing violence to bear against common sense to contend that reading a story after it has been understood, obliterates intelligence.

After the story has been told, the children open their books, and one or more read it aloud—the teacher adding any further explanations that may be necessary. Teachers—this is important—in telling the story should endeavour to adhere pretty closely to the words of the book. Other-

wise, if the language differs notably from that in the book, the children, when reading the story for themselves, will be puzzled and perplexed. Considerable variety in language will only confuse them.

So far the children have listened to the story with attention, and have understood it. But the impression, like lines written in water, will quickly disappear, unless measures be taken to fix it in the memory. This is the next process. Our knowledge is coextensive with our memory. We know as much or as little as we remember. Memory, says Hirschfelder, is the mortar that holds the bricks together. Without memory, the combined action of understanding, heart and will, can only succeed in erecting a pile of loose stones. Furthermore, many Catechists of note insist that the text should be committed to memory, word for word, at least by young children. Thus Alleker argues that a free reproduction is beyond the capabilities of all but advanced pupils, and that it is far easier for children to reproduce the matter in the form set before them. Hirschfelder truly observes that children are unequal to improving on the form given in the book, and that, when the lesson is not exacted word for word, the tendency, especially in the quicker and brighter children, is to learn it in the most slipshod fashion. Perhaps time will throw light on this question. Meanwhile teachers may do much towards facilitating the by-heart and making it intelligent, by pointing out the natural divisions of the story, the connexion between the several parts, etc.

As regards the *repetition in class*, I cannot do better than give in substance Dr. Knecht's words. The repetition consists in the children telling the story independently, and in a connected fashion. ~~X~~It should be no parrot-prattle, no mechanical outpouring of sentences conned by rote; but the story should be told intelligently, with correct expression and emphasis. In particular, teachers should beware of letting the children either speak too quickly, or fall into a sing-song, drawling, or hum-drum style.

Commentary. Hitherto all our efforts have been concentrated on the Bible story in itself. The children have seized

the right points of the story; they have learnt the course of events, and have gained an insight into the motives that impelled the actors in the drama; they understand the immediate meaning of the phrases in which the story is told. But the deeper meaning of the story is still hidden from them. ~~X~~ The commentary is the key that opens the gate of this wider knowledge. The Bible narrative is no longer to be viewed as a story, but as a revelation from God, disclosing God's will and God's attributes. Every Bible story contains dogmatic and moral truths. One might almost say that the events happened for the sake of these truths. To draw out these truths, and bring them vividly before the children, is the most important part of instruction in Bible History. And this is the function of the commentary. Thus the commentary brings out the *typical* character of persons and things; it unearths the truths buried in our Lord's parables; it unfolds the spiritual meaning underlying His miracles. But, most of all, it shows what bearing Bible stories have on doctrines of faith and morals, on the cultus and institutions of the Church. Thus the teacher has to hand an instrument which, if wisely used, is admirably adapted for deepening the religious knowledge and strengthening the religious convictions of the children, and for arming their faith on all points. Such is Dr. Knecht's account of the function of the commentary. And he goes on to point out the qualities that the commentary should have if it is to be effective. 1. It must be according to the mind of the Church, whom Christ has appointed to guard and expound Holy Scripture. The commentary is not intended for a platform on which the teacher can air his own crude opinions. 2. It must be catechetical. Both in matter and manner it must conform to the rules of Catechetics, i. e. it must be adapted to the class to which it is given. ~~X~~ All platitudes, vague generalities, and scattered reflections wide of the mark are to be carefully shunned, as they leave only a nauseating effect. 3. The teacher must keep steadily in view the close connexion that should subsist between Bible History and religious instruction. On this point sufficient has already been said.

Application. On this last factor little need be said. It consists in holding up the mirror to nature; in making the children realize that the events recorded, though happening ten thousand miles away and some thousands of years back, have an interest and a concern for them, and are part and parcel of their own lives. The temptations and struggles, the falls and conversions, the unkept promises here depicted, are a reflection of our own conduct, and are written for our warning and encouragement and self-knowledge. Moreover, in the application, the truths elicited in the commentary are brought home to the individual child, and are held up to him as a rule of life and conduct.

4.

Such, in short, is the programme that Dr. Knecht has mapped out for himself in his *Practical Commentary*. A programme most inviting and comprehensive! To many, doubtless, it will appear too vast to be carried out successfully. But I have no hesitation in saying that Dr. Knecht's success is as great as his programme is vast. His work first saw the light in 1883, and since then twelve large editions have been exhausted. This fact alone speaks volumes for his success. His work marks an immense advance on anything that has been published in this country. In fact, we have nothing in any way like it; nothing that approaches it within a measurable distance. Our text-books, at their best, give but a good narrative; at their worst, I fear to say what they do. But best and worst alike have entered into an unholy covenant to give next to nothing beyond the narrative. Now, thanks to Dr. Knecht and his translator, we have a work that, in addition to a good narrative, supplies a good explanation, and an excellent commentary. The very idea that Bible History needs an explanation and a commentary will, I suspect, come to many like a bolt from the blue. But I trust that after the appearance of Dr. Knecht's work we shall be ashamed to issue any more Bible Histories in the good old dry-as-dust style.

The narrative in the *Practical Commentary* is Dr. Schuster's Bible History. This work itself has already been translated into eighteen languages, and has run into I know not how many editions. Let it, however, be noted that the *Practical Commentary* is not inextricably bound up with any particular form of narrative, and it will be found equally serviceable with any other narrative that teachers may prefer to take as the groundwork.

In particular, I would call attention to the excellent "Concordance between Holy Scripture and the Catechism", as it is called, given in the Appendix. In it the teacher will find ready to hand an invaluable repertory of Bible stories and explanations for illustrating his catechetical instructions.

In conclusion, I wish to re-echo with all earnestness the words of a writer in the *Schweizer Pastoralblatt*: "I consider this *Commentary* the best and most useful hand-book of its kind . . . I am happy to think that every day strengthens my conviction of its great worth, and I should like to see it in the hands of every priest and every teacher." I will only add that it is indispensable to every teacher who would be abreast of his work. To priests it will be most useful, not only in the school, but also in the pulpit, as it supplies most suggestive material for courses of sermons. And I make bold to affirm that no one, be he priest or teacher, can take up without profit this excellent manual, not the least merit of which is that it has imparted a thoroughly *religious* character to the teaching of Bible History.

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FIRST PART.

THE OLD TESTAMENT.

FIRST EPOCH.

THE PRIMITIVE AGES.

From Adam to Abraham (about 4000—2100 b. C.).

CHAPTER I.

THE CREATION OF THE WORLD.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

IN the beginning¹ God created heaven and earth². The earth was void³ and empty⁴; darkness was on the face of the deep⁵, and the Spirit of God⁶ moved over the waters. God said⁷: "Be light made!" and light was made. This was the first day⁸.

¹ in the beginning of time. — ² i. e. both the visible and invisible worlds. This sentence relates to the whole of creation generally; what follows, to the creation of the earth in particular. — ³ which means that it was an unformed mass, all confusion and chaos. — ⁴ without life in it, or without any plants, animals, or men on it. — ⁵ i. e. on the unformed mass of primeval matter. This mass was wrapped in gloom and darkness; and, being soft and fluid, is styled "the waters". — ⁶ The Holy Ghost moved over the unformed mass in order to form it, and prepare it to be the dwelling-place of men and beasts. — ⁷ or commanded. — ⁸ The first day, or the first period. Holy Scripture does not tell us the length of this period, nor is it necessary for our salvation that we should know.

On the second day God said: "Let there be a firmament⁹ made amidst the waters; and let it divide¹⁰ the waters from the waters." And it was so¹¹. God called the firmament heaven¹².

⁹ in other words, the atmosphere which surrounds our earth to the height of about 45 miles, and looks to our eyes like a blue dome. —

¹⁰ The firmament was to divide one part of the waters from the other part in this way: God made a considerable body of water to ascend,

in the form of moisture, into the atmosphere, thus separating it from the water which remains and flows on the earth. — ¹¹ i. e. it was as God had commanded. — ¹² This is not the heaven where the angels and saints dwell, and contemplate God. A distinction must be made between that heaven, and the visible, natural heaven, i. e. the firmament.

On the third day God said: "Let the waters that are under the heaven ¹³ be gathered into one place ¹⁴; and let the dry land appear." ¹⁵ And it was so done. God called the dry land earth; and the gathered waters seas. He also said: "Let the earth ¹⁶ bring forth the green herb, and such as may seed ¹⁷, and the fruit-tree yielding fruit after its kind." And it was so done ¹⁸.

¹³ i. e. below the atmosphere, or, in other words, the waters that are on the earth. — ¹⁴ This one place is the great ocean, out of the midst of which the five parts of the earth rear themselves. — ¹⁵ God made the water to gather itself together into rivers, lakes, and seas, and the dry land to appear. How this happened is described in Psalm 103, 6 and 8: "Above the mountains shall the waters stand . . . The mountains ascend, and the plains descend into the place which Thou hast founded for them." Until the third day of creation, the whole earth was covered with water. But on the third day of creation certain parts of the earth's surface raised themselves up. These became dry because the water ran off them; and the lower parts of the earth's surface, towards which the water flowed, became the sea. About a quarter of the surface of the globe (accurately 27 per cent) is dry land, and nearly three quarters (accurately 73 per cent), water. — ¹⁶ which was now dry. — ¹⁷ i. e. all sorts of plants. — ¹⁸ God made plants of every kind to grow out of the dry ground, and gave them the power of producing their own seed. From these seeds there sprang new plants, and thus the world of plants never died out.

The fourth day God said: "Let there be lights made in the firmament of heaven, to divide the day and the night, and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years." And it was so done. God made the sun, moon, and countless stars, and set them in the firmament of heaven, to shine upon the earth ¹⁹, and to rule the day and the night.

The fifth day God said: "Let the waters bring forth the creeping creatures having life, and the fowl that may fly over the earth under the firmament of heaven." And God created fish and birds of every kind, and He blessed them saying: "Increase and multiply." ²⁰



¹⁹ God made the sun, the moon, and the stars, to give light to the earth. From henceforth now, that its surface had cooled and the exhalations which surrounded it had dispersed, the earth was to receive light and warmth from the sun. The heavenly bodies were to serve also as measures of time. The rising of the sun brings day to the earth, and its setting, night. According to the relative position of the sun and moon to the earth, time is divided into years, and seasons, and months. — ²⁰ They were to multiply of themselves, ever increasing in number. As plants propagate themselves by means of their seeds, so birds and fishes can, by the blessing of God, lay eggs, which in their turn become birds and fishes.

On the sixth day God said: "Let the earth bring forth the living creature in its kind: cattle and creeping things, and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so done ²¹. At last God created man, and gave him dominion over all the rest. And God saw all the works that He had made, and they were very good ²². The seventh day God rested ²³, and He blessed ²⁴ that day ²⁵ and made it holy ²⁶.

²¹ i. e. God created the mammals which are the highest race of beasts. God first created the lower and then the higher classes of animals; and, last of all, He created man, the highest of all visible

creatures. How God created man will be told in the third chapter. — ²² Everything was as God's goodness and wisdom desired it to be; everything fulfilled the end for which He had created it. He disposed everything in such a way that nothing could be better or more exactly adapted to its purpose than it was. — ²³ Man requires rest after he has worked hard, because he is tired. Can God then be tired? No, God could create thousands of worlds without being tired. The words, 'He rested', mean this: that after the sixth day, after the creation of man, God created no new kind of being. — ²⁴ He ordained that this day should bring a blessing both to soul and body on those who keep it holy. — ²⁵ What was the seventh day called in the Old Testament? The Sabbath, or day of rest. — ²⁶ It was to be a day, holy and consecrated to God.

God had already created light on the first day, but this light was not the light of the sun. It was on the fourth day that God made the sun, to be the giver of light to the earth.

God made light first, because without light and without warmth, which is connected with it, there could be no growth, no life, no order in nature.

God made the atmosphere on the second day, because neither plants, nor animals, nor men can live without air. Sound also is impossible without air, so that without it there could have been neither speech nor hearing.

On the third day God made the earth to be dry, and plants to grow on it. But plants, to live and thrive, require something besides light and air. Therefore, it was that God had already on the second day caused part of the water to remain in the air, to supply the plants with moisture from above, either by means of dew or rain.

The works of the first three days, and those of the last three, are thus related to each other:

1 st day. The light.	4 th day. The bodies of light.
2 nd day. The atmosphere which divided the waters.	5 th day. The inhabitants of the air and water: the birds and fishes.
3 rd day. The dry land.	6 th day. The inhabitants of the dry land: the beasts and man.

II. Commentary.

Time began with the world. Once, nothing existed but the Eternal God alone. "Before the mountains were made, or the earth and the world was formed, from eternity and to eternity Thou art God" (Ps. 89, 2). Why does not the Psalmist say, 'Thou wast God', instead of 'Thou art God?' Because God is Eternal. He is not subject to the changes of time, for with God there is no past, no future, nothing

but an everlasting present. "I am who am", God said to Moses" (Old Test. XXXI, 3). God exists of and by Himself. Every thing else is made by God.

God is Almighty. God created the whole world, visible and invisible, material and spiritual, out of nothing by His almighty will. His almighty power is manifested to us in creation. By His word, that is, by His will, He called into existence the earth, moon, and the whole, to us, immeasurable universe, with its millions and millions of heavenly bodies. "God spoke and they were made, He commanded and they were created" (Ps. 32, 9).

God works unceasingly. What then do the words, 'He rested on the seventh day', mean? Has God done nothing more since the sixth day? Our Lord says: "My Father works till now and I work" (New Test. XXVI). God is continually working for the good of His creatures, for only He who called the world into existence can sustain and govern it. If Almighty God were to withdraw His hand from the world, at that moment it would collapse and fall into ruin. Every day, every hour of life is a gift of Almighty God.

The Sabbath. With the creation of man, God's plan of creation was completed, and the great work of His creative love was crowned; for man is the most perfect of visible creatures. Then God rested, and appointed the seventh day for man's rest in Him. On the Sabbath, man was to contemplate the wonders of creation, and the preservation and government of the world, and to praise and thank God. On this account the seventh day is also called "the Lord's day", i. e. the day set apart for the service and worship of God. On this day we ought to put aside all worldly business, and think only of our souls and their welfare, for in God alone can our souls find peace and rest. The commandment to keep holy the Sabbath is the oldest commandment that there is. Ever since the world has stood as it is, this commandment has stood with it. The law was given by God at the creation of the world, and, therefore, it is that among all, even heathen, nations we find one day of rest observed in the week. It is a great impiety to desecrate God's day.

The Blessed Trinity. In the Old Testament God did not reveal His unity in three Persons very clearly. The Israelites were so prone to the worship of false gods that they might easily have got to look on the three Divine Persons as three distinct gods. But, all the same, in several passages of the Old Testament it is, as it were, hinted that there are more Persons than one in God, e. g. in the first part of the history of the creation: "The Spirit of God moved over the waters."

The Wisdom of God. Holy Scripture, or, in other words, the Holy Ghost, says explicitly that all that God made was very good. Short-sighted man should not, therefore, be audacious enough to criticise God's work. Almighty God made everything to fulfil the end for which He destined it. The whole of creation testifies to the wisdom of God, but I will only call your attention to one or two instances. Rivers and streams, many of which are of considerable breadth, are ceaselessly flowing into the sea, carrying into it, even in one single day, a tremendous volume of water. This goes on all the year round, and has been going on for thousands of years, and yet the sea does not overflow! How is this? God has so made it that as much water is incessantly rising into the air from the sea as is being poured into it. But how is it, then, that the streams and rivers do not dry up? Whence comes that volume of water which they are continuously pouring into the sea? The mists and clouds which rise from the sea are driven over the land by the wind, and fall back on the earth in the form of either dew, fog, rain or snow. This moisture collects in the ground and forms springs. These springs feed the streams and rivers which carry the water back again to the sea. It is owing to this continuous circulation of water that the sea does not overflow, or the rivers dry up. Moreover, those damp exhalations supply the air with that moisture which is necessary to the life of men and beasts, and to the growth of plants. One thing more. You know that water turns putrid when it remains for some time without being stirred. How is it that though it is shut in one place, the water of the sea never turns putrid? The goodness of God has provided against this by the constant motion of the sea. Twice every day the water flows from the centre of the sea towards the shore, and back again. Besides this, from time to time God sends winds and storms which stir the sea to its very depths. Such phenomena as these show us the wonderful wisdom manifested in the creation and preservation of the world. In like manner all other creatures bear witness to the wisdom of God. Bees, ants, ears of corn, leaves of the trees—in a word, all things teach us to admire His wisdom. Whether we contemplate nature in its greater or lesser aspects, we must exclaim with David: "How great are Thy works, O Lord! Thou hast made all things in wisdom. The earth is filled with Thy riches" (Ps. 103, 24).

The infinite Greatness and Majesty of God are also revealed to us by creation. Think how enormous this earth is! It is 24,869 miles

in circumference; its surface covers 196,000,000 square miles; its solidity is 259 billions of cubic miles. Enormous as this seems, the sun is 1,400,000 times as large as the earth, though it is not so dense. The number of stars, most of which can be seen only through a telescope, amounts to millions, though their number cannot be accurately fixed by man. The nearest fixed star is about four billions (or four million millions) of miles away from us. If, then, the universe is so great, how much greater must He be who called all these spheres into existence, and who keeps and sustains them in space, pointing out its path to each one! He "tellethe the number of the stars, and calleth them all by their names. Great is our Lord, and great is His power, and of His wisdom there is no number" (Ps. 146, 4. 5). Full of awe and reverence we ought to pray in some such words as these: "Great God, we praise Thee! We praise Thy power, O Lord! The earth bows down before Thee in wonder at Thy works! Even as Thou wast in all time, so wilt Thou be to all eternity. Heaven and earth, sky and sea are full of Thy glory. All things are Thine!"

III. Application.

God being so infinitely great and wise, we ought to be filled with the deepest reverence for His Divine majesty. He is, indeed, the Eternal, the Most High, the Creator and Lord of the whole universe. And yet how little reverence you have borne Him hitherto! Have you not often prayed to Him carelessly? Have you never dishonoured His holy name? Have you not often transgressed His commandments? Firmly resolve, then, that you will for the future honour the Lord your God more, and serve Him more zealously. We pay honour to God by often thinking about Him and by adoring Him with reverence and devotion. St. Patrick used to worship God on his knees three hundred times every day. So, think more about your Lord and Creator, both to-day and for the future, and pray to Him devoutly and from your heart. Let everything you look at impel you to say thus to yourself: "I praise Thee, O great God, and worship Thy power and wisdom. ✕ As many stars as there are in the heavens, as many flowers as grow in the field, as many leaves as there are on the trees, as many drops as there are in the ocean, so many times may God be praised and magnified!"

God made the earth to be the dwelling-place of man, and has adorned it for him with divine prodigality. He has

given us much more than is necessary for our existence. Are the numberless flowers which grow, necessary for life? Could we not live without the many sorts of fruit that there are? Take to heart, then, how good and generous God is towards us. Thank Him heartily for His gifts, and resolve that you will from this day forward say your grace before and after meals very devoutly.

CHAPTER II.

CREATION AND FALL OF THE ANGELS.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

BESIDES the visible world, God also created an invisible world, namely, innumerable spirits, called angels. They were all good and happy¹, and endowed with excellent gifts

of nature and grace²; but they did not all continue in that state, for, being possessed of a free will, a great many of them abused it, lost the grace of God, and became wicked. They rebelled against God—Lucifer, their leader, saying: “We shall be like unto the Most High; we will place our throne above the stars.” Then, there was a great strife in heaven. Michael³ and the other angels who had remained faithful to God, fought against the bad and rebellious spirits, whose chief is now called



ed Satan, or the devil. The bad angels were conquered, and cast from heaven down to hell. The angels who re-

mained faithful ⁴ were rewarded with everlasting happiness ⁵. They ever see the face of God in heaven.

¹ They loved and wished for only what was good, and pleased God.

² God has endowed them with such pre-eminent gifts that they are superior to all other created beings. Their chief gifts are sublime understanding, great strength, and, above all, sanctifying grace. —

³ an archangel, and the leader of the good angels. — ⁴ faithful to whom? To the Lord God. — ⁵ The angels had been happy from the beginning, but their happiness was not always complete, because it could be lost. As we have seen, it was lost by the bad angels. But after the good angels had proved steadfast, and had overthrown the bad angels, they received as a reward the supernatural and eternal happiness of heaven, which they could never again lose.

II. Commentary.

The angelic nature, and the infinite Perfections of God. The angels are spirits; God is also a Spirit, but there is an infinite difference between Almighty God, and the highest angel. The angels have a sublime understanding, great wisdom, and much knowledge, but neither understanding, wisdom, nor knowledge is infinite. Their wills are holy, and are much more powerful than ours, but they are not infinitely holy. Nor are the angels almighty. They have received all their great qualities from God. He has all His perfections of Himself, and from all eternity: the angels were created by God in the beginning of time, and received everything from Him. The angels are, indeed, wondrously perfect, but they are not infinitely perfect. Their perfections have a limit, a measure, a number. God's perfections, on the other hand, are infinitely great, without limit, measure, or number.

The office of the Angels. Like everything else, the angels were created for the honour and glory of God. They love and praise God, and fulfil His holy will without ceasing. Hence the meaning of the words in the Our Father: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." The name angel signifies messenger or envoy; this name being given to the good spirits, because God sends them to take care of men and make known to them His will. The angels, being pure spirits, cannot be seen with our bodily eyes, but if it is God's will

that men should see and hear them, when they are sent as messengers from Him, they are able to assume a human form. Take, for example, the holy Archangel Gabriel who appeared to Zachary and to our Lady.

Pictures of Angels (see p. 5). You have often seen pictures of the holy angels. There are several of them in Schuster's Bible History (revised by Mrs. J. Sadlier. New Edition). Look at the picture on page 2. How are the angels represented there? As boys with wings, two of them playing on harps. On page 222, the holy Archangel Gabriel is represented as a youth with wings, holding a lily in his hand, and with a glory round his head. Why should they be drawn like that? They are represented as boys or youths, because they never grow old, but are everlastingly young, and are immortal. The wings signify that the angels are swift as thought, and fulfil God's commands quickly and willingly. The harps are to remind us that the angels ceaselessly sing God's praises. The lily signifies their purity, and the glory, their heavenly splendour. Very often angels are pictured as children's heads without bodies, to signify that they have understanding and free-will, but that they are spirits without bodies.

God is good. Of His love God created the angels, and loaded them with natural and supernatural gifts.

God is just. God's justice is shown to us by the punishment of the bad angels and the reward of the good. How did God punish the bad angels? For how long must they remain in hell? For ever and ever! They must suffer everlasting torments! They are rejected by God and are banished from Him for ever and ever! They hardened themselves against Him, therefore, repentance was impossible. "God spared not the angels that sinned: but delivered them, drawn down by infernal ropes to the lower hell, unto torments to be reserved unto judgment" (2 Pet. 2, 4).

The evil of mortal sin. God punishes according to our deserts: He never punishes too severely. If, therefore, He condemned the fallen angels to the eternal torments of hell, we can see what a terrible evil sin is in His sight. One single mortal sin deserves everlasting punishment.

The consequences of sin. Just think what befell the angels through sin! Before their fall they were the friends and beloved of God, most beautiful, most holy, full of the love

of what is good, and rich in their happiness and glory. But since their fall they have been enemies of God, horrible, hideous, and eternally miserable devils! Who, after contemplating this ruin caused by sin, could possibly think that sin, and especially mortal sin, is a trifle which God will not deal with severely? No! mortal sin, far from being a trifle, is the greatest of all evils. It changed angels into devils, and cast them into hell!

Pride. What was the cause of the fallen angels' disobedience? Instead of giving glory to God, from Whom they had received all things, they became proud of their great gifts, and, with their leader, said: "We will ascend above the heights of the clouds, we will be like the Most High" (Is. 14, 14). Therefore, Holy Scripture says: "Pride is the beginning of all sin" (Eccclus. 10, 15).

Happiness of the Angels. Almighty God richly rewarded those angels who remained faithful. They gaze upon Him face to face, they rejoice unceasingly in His infinite beauty and majesty, and are thereby made inexpressibly happy. They have lived in this state of rapture for thousands of years, and will do so for all eternity. It is thus that God rewards those who are faithful to Him, and overcome evil.

The number of the Angels created by God is inconceivably great. The prophet Daniel saw them in spirit, and wrote thus: "Thousands of thousands ministered to Him (i. e. to God), and, ten, thousand times a hundred thousand stood before Him" (Dan. 7, 10). The prophet means by these words that the angels cannot be counted. And as the stars in heaven vary in size and splendour, so are there differences of degree among the holy angels. They are divided into nine choirs, according to each one's degree of wisdom, power and glory. These are, beginning with the lowest: Angels, Archangels, Virtues, Powers, Principalities, Dominations, Thrones, Cherubim, Seraphim.

Probation of the Angels. The angels are by their nature like to God, being highly gifted and pure spirits. To these natural gifts God added the supernatural gift of sanctifying grace, by means of which they became thoroughly holy, and wonderfully beautiful. Their state was, even at first, one of great happiness; but by faithfulness in the service of God they were capable of winning for themselves an eternal and supernatural happiness. God will not have any forced service; so He gave to the angels the gift of free-will, by which they were at

liberty to choose between good and evil, and could freely side either with God or against Him. When the decisive moment came, a portion of the angels made a bad use of their freedom, rebelled against God, lost sanctifying grace, and were cast into hell, their wills having become perverted and bad. But the good angels, who stood the trial, were admitted into the immediate Presence of God, and were confirmed for ever in supernatural happiness.

III. Application.

God is just and punishes sin. How is it, then, that you think so little of sinning and offending God? You are still young, but you have committed many sins, and have deserved punishment at God's hands. Repent, therefore, of your sins, ask pardon of God, and never say again to yourself: "It is only a trifle!" It never could be a trifle to intentionally offend the great, holy and just God! Resolve, then, most firmly never again to sin wilfully. If you are ever tempted to commit a mortal sin, think of the fallen angels and their eternal torment. Die rather than commit a mortal sin! Fear the just God, and keep His commandments faithfully.

The fall of the bad angels should be a warning to you, and the faithfulness of the good angels should be an encouragement to you. If you are disobedient to God, and do not observe His laws, and if you think slightly of sin, you will some day join the lost spirits in hell. But if you are faithful in the service of God, and guard against sin as much as you can, you will some day join the angels in their everlasting happiness. Which of the two have you imitated hitherto, the good or the bad angels?

Above all things guard against pride; it is, as Holy Scripture says, hateful before God and men (Ecclus. 10, 7). Do not be conceited or vain about your clothes, or your appearance, or your knowledge, or your parents' position, but give glory to God in all things; for you have received everything from Him. The more God has given you, the more you should thank Him. Drive away all vain thoughts, and say thus very often: "Every good gift comes from Thee, O God. I thank Thee for all that I am and for all that I have!"

CHAPTER III.

CREATION OF THE FIRST MAN.—PARADISE.—THE FIRST COMMANDMENT.—CREATION OF EVE.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

WHEN God created man, He said: "Let Us make man¹ to Our image and likeness², and give him dominion³ over all animals and over the whole earth." He, then, formed⁴ a human body of the slime of the earth, breathed into his face the breath of life⁵, and man became a living soul⁶. At the same moment God added to the nature of man many favours, and, especially, sanctifying grace. Thus was made the first man, who was named Adam, that is to say, man taken from the earth. By his nature, man was the image of God; by grace, he was the likeness of God.

¹ i. e. We will make. When God called into existence the rest of the visible world, He simply said: "Let it be!" But when He willed to make man, He took, as it were, counsel with Himself, and said: "Let Us make &c." Is it, then, necessary for God to consider and ponder how to act for the best? No, indeed! Then, why did He speak in that way before creating man? It was in order to prove that man was not to be like other visible creatures, but was to be their superior, the first among them all. — ² Let him be a picture or image of Us, and like unto Us. — ³ i. e. he lord over. — ⁴ To form means to make something skilfully. God Himself made the human body most perfectly out of the earth. — ⁵ The soul, therefore, is not made from the earth, but is a breath of God. — ⁶ By what means did man become a living being? God breathed a soul into the human body. The soul is the cause of the body's life; without it the body cannot live. When the soul is separated from the body, the body dies.

By a special effect of His goodness the Lord God created expressly for man a garden of pleasure, called Paradise⁷. There were in it all sorts of beautiful trees, covered with delicious fruit; and in the middle of the garden stood the Tree of life⁸, and the Tree of the knowledge of good and evil⁹. A river, divided into four branches, watered the whole garden. It was in this garden of delights that God placed man, that he might cultivate it for his own pleasure and occupation¹⁰. God, then, commanded¹¹ man, saying: "Of every tree of Paradise thou shalt eat, but of the Tree of the

knowledge of good and evil thou shalt not eat; for in what day soever thou shalt eat of it, thou shalt die the death." ¹²

⁷ This Paradise was on earth (in Asia), for which reason it is called the earthly paradise. Heaven, the place of eternal happiness, is also called paradise, but it is the supernatural and heavenly paradise. —

⁸ The tree was thus named, because it preserved the body of man from sickness and death, and made it immortal. — ⁹ This other tree was so named, because if man ate of it he would, of himself, and by his own experience, know the difference between good and evil. — ¹⁰ In Paradise man worked for his own pleasure, and devoted his strength to the care of the beautiful garden of delights. — ¹¹ Almighty God imposed a command on man, in order to prove whether he were thankful and obedient.

This command was very easy to obey, because there was an abundance of every kind of fruit in the garden. — ¹² i. e. become mortal, or subject to death. God added this threat to ensure the keeping of the command. By the threatened penalty of death it was easy for man to perceive how great his sin would be if he ate the forbidden fruit.

Adam was still alone on the earth. Hence God said: "It is not good for man to be alone ¹³; let Us make him a help like unto himself." Then, God caused all the animals to come before Adam, that he might give to each its name. But for Adam there was not found a help like to himself; therefore, casting a deep sleep ¹⁴ upon Adam, God took one of his ribs and formed of it a woman. When Adam awoke God brought to him his wife; and Adam rejoiced to see another being like himself. He called her Eve, that is, the mother of the living ¹⁵.

¹³ It is not good for man to be alone. He cannot converse or entertain himself with the beasts, for they have no reason, and cannot speak. Therefore, God said that He would give him a companion like unto himself, one who would have the same nature, i. e. a human body and soul such as Adam had. Before God formed Eve, He called all the beasts of paradise to Adam, so that 1. Adam might exercise his dominion over them by giving to each one a name suitable to its character; 2. to prove to him that none of the animals were like himself, and that his nature was far higher than theirs; 3. so that Adam, by finding himself lonely in the midst of all the beasts, might feel the want of a companion like himself, and might be the more grateful to God for creating Eve. — ¹⁴ It was a sleep of ecstasy, during which he was aware of the significance of God's action, both to himself and to all future generations. — ¹⁵ i. e. of all men. Adam is the father, and Eve the mother of all men, because all men are descended from them

II. Commentary.

God is good. To know this you have only to count up the benefits and graces which He conferred on Adam and Eve.

The twofold likeness to God. Man is the first among all God's creatures on earth, because he was created to the image of God, and is, therefore, like unto Him. This likeness is, however, a twofold one, a natural and a supernatural one, for which reason the two words, image and likeness, are used. For something to be the image of a person or of some other thing, it must be, to a certain degree, like that person or thing; but "likeness" signifies a still closer degree of resemblance. If one person is almost the same as another, we say they are *alike*. Thus the word "image" applies to the natural, and "likeness" to the supernatural resemblance of man to God. The natural likeness of man to God consists in this, that man has a spirit, called his soul, which lives in his body, and which makes his body live. This soul is immortal, reasonable, and gifted with free-will. By these three qualities, it is, in a measure, like unto God, Who is eternal, Whose intelligence is supreme, and Whose will is infinitely free. These gifts are called natural gifts, because they belong to the nature of the human soul, and cannot be lost by it, though they can be marred and disfigured. The first man's supernatural likeness to God consisted in those gifts which do not belong to the nature of man, but soar far above it, for which reason they are called supernatural gifts. The chief among these gifts was sanctifying grace. The Holy Ghost dwelt in the soul of the first man, who became thereby a child of God and an heir to heaven; or in other words, he was sure of heaven so long as he remained in a state of grace. By this grace the soul of man was made very beautiful, nearly as beautiful as are the angels in heaven. Moreover, the Holy Ghost raised the natural powers of the human soul, and gifted it with great knowledge, so that man knew God and His ways much better than he could possibly have known them otherwise. He sanctified man's free-will so that he not only desired what was good, but had no inclination towards what

was evil. The body of the first man also possessed supernatural gifts. The natural body is frail and subject to sickness and death, because it is made from the earth, and, like every other earthly thing, is perishable. But so long as the first man remained in a state of grace, his body was immortal, and free from all sickness and need of labour. If our first parents had remained in a state of grace, they would not have died, but would have been translated, body and soul, from the earthly to the heavenly paradise.

U *The body of man*, indeed, bears no likeness to God, for *God has no body*; but all the same it has high prerogatives. It is the dwelling-place and instrument of an immortal soul. It is more delicate and beautiful, more complete and better adapted to every kind of work than the bodies of any of the beasts. It stands erect, and raises its eyes to the heaven for which man was created. It is the masterpiece of the visible creation. Man should, therefore, hold his body in honour and not pollute it by sin. "Glorify and bear God in your body" (1 Cor. 6, 20).

X *Man is made to rule over the beasts and over the whole earth.* The earth belongs to God. "The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof, the world and all they that dwell therein" (Ps. 23, 1). But He has made it over to man that he may use its good things according to God's will. The rivers and mountains, the fields and woods, the plants and beasts, were made for the use of man, for the preservation and beautifying of his life; and in order that he may utilize them for good works. But we must use the good things of this earth, such as gold, silver, meat, drink etc., for a good end, and not misuse them. We should rule over the things of this world, and not make ourselves their slave, like, for instance, the miser, who is not master of his possessions, but is their slave. Our thoughts and aspirations should soar beyond this world towards those things which are supernatural and eternal. We must make such use of earthly treasures, as not by their abuse to lose everlasting treasures. It is, moreover, God's will that man should have dominion over the beasts, but it is not God's will that he

should be cruel to them. "The just regardeth the lives of his beasts, but the bowels of the wicked are cruel" (Prov. 12, 10). Therefore, be on your guard against cruelty to animals!

Twofold death. By the words, "What day thou eatest thereof thou shalt die the death", Almighty God threatened man with a twofold death, the death of the soul and the death of the body. This last did not take place immediately after the sin was committed, for Adam lived on earth till he was 930 years old; but all the same, from the moment he sinned his body became liable to death. The death of the soul, on the contrary, took place the very instant the sin was committed. A distinction must, of course, be made between the natural and the supernatural life of the soul. It cannot lose its natural life, because it is immortal; but it loses its supernatural life, its life of grace and friendship with God, the moment it commits a grievous sin. The loss of grace is the soul's spiritual death, and leads to its eternal death, on which account grievous sins, which cause the spiritual death of the soul, are called mortal sins.

The Blessed Trinity. The words, "Let Us make &c.", imply that there are more Persons than one in God.

The unity of the human race. Why did God form Eve out of one of Adam's ribs? Firstly, because all mankind, even Eve, was to proceed from Adam. Secondly, because husband and wife ought to belong to one another, and to be but one heart and soul by their love and unity.

The happiness of Heaven. The life of our first parents in the earthly paradise was a type of the life of the blessed in heaven. They were perfectly happy in Paradise. Peace reigned within and around them, because they were at peace with God. They had abundance of everything; they knew no pain, no want, no vexation, and lived in undisturbed joy and friendship with God and with each another. So also the life of the blessed in heaven is one of supreme happiness: there is no complaint nor sorrow there, nothing but peace, joy and glory! In the earthly paradise God held intercourse with our first parents, as a father does with his children. In heaven the blessed gaze on God face to face, and are united to

Him by the closest love. But now comes the difference! The happiness of the earthly paradise could be lost, but the happiness of the blessed in heaven must be theirs for ever.

The probation of man. Man, like the angels, was gifted with free-will, and like them he had to undergo a probation. God gave him a command, by means of which he could freely choose either to side with Him or against Him. Adam being the representative and father of the human race, there rested on his decision not only his own fate but the fate of all his posterity. An illustration of this we see in the case of a father who, by gambling away his fortune, makes his children losers as well as himself.

Marriage. When God gave Eve to Adam to be his companion and pronounced His blessing on both, He instituted marriage. Being instituted by God, it is in any case a holy state, but Jesus Christ sanctified it still more and raised it to be a Sacrament. God Himself joins man and wife. "What God hath joined together let no man put asunder" (Mat. 19, 6). Marriage, therefore, is indissoluble, i. e. a man and his wife must remain joined together till death.

The man is the head of the family. God Himself named Adam, but it was Adam who gave Eve her name. Why did God ordain this so? Because the husband is the head of the wife, and the wife is to obey her husband.

The Tree of knowledge a type of the Cross of Christ. As by the Tree of knowledge it was to be decided whether man would choose good or evil, so is Christ the Crucified "set for the fall and for the resurrection of many" (Luke 2, 34). They who believe in Him crucified, and follow Him will obtain eternal life; but those who will not believe in the crucified Saviour, and will not follow Him will be eternally lost. The devil conquered by means of the Tree of knowledge; but by the Cross he was conquered. With the one, sin began; with the other, redemption and salvation.

The Tree of life a type of the Blessed Sacrament. Even as the life of the body was preserved by this tree, so by the Blessed Sacrament, grace, the supernatural life of the soul, is increased and preserved in it, and the soul made worthy of everlasting life. "If any man eat of this bread he shall live forever", said our Lord (New Test. XXXIV). [About the Tree of life in the paradise of heaven, see Appendix, New Testament.]

III. Application.

God's goodness to man is infinitely great. Just think how He has singled him out and raised him! He created him to His own image, and appointed the whole earth for his use. He gave him an immortal soul and sanctifying grace,

placed him in the beautiful garden of Paradise, and in addition to this gave him the promise of eternal happiness in heaven; for man was intended to occupy those thrones in heaven which the fallen angels had lost. And all this was destined not only for the first man, but for all his posterity! Just think, then, how loving were God's intentions towards man! "Praise the Lord, for He is good, for his mercy endureth for ever!" (Ps. 117, 1.) "Let us, therefore, love God, because God first hath loved us" (1 John 4, 19). Whatever you may be doing to-day say: "I love Thee, O my God!"

CHAPTER IV.

Part I.

THE FALL OF OUR FIRST PARENTS.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

OF all the animals that God had placed upon the earth, none was more cunning than the serpent¹. Hence the devil, who was envious of the happiness of our first parents, made use of him in order to seduce them. Eve, prompted by curiosity, approaching the forbidden tree, saw a serpent near it. He began to speak², and said to her: "Why has God commanded you³ that you should not eat of every tree of Paradise?"⁴ Eve answered: "Of the fruit of the trees of Paradise we do eat; but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of Paradise, God has commanded us that we should not eat, and that we should not touch it⁵, lest, perhaps, we die."⁶ The serpent said to the woman: "No, surely you shall not die⁷ if you eat of the fruit of the tree; but, rather⁸, your eyes shall be opened⁹, and you shall be as gods¹⁰, knowing good and evil." Hearing this, Eve gave way to pride, and she saw that the fruit was good and pleasant to behold. She took and ate of the fruit, and gave to her husband, and he also ate. Thus was the first sin committed.

¹ The devil, full of envy at the happiness possessed by Adam and Eve, and made more envious still by the thought that they were intended to attain to the everlasting happiness which he himself had forfeited, made use of the serpent by entering into it and speaking by

its mouth. God allowed him no other tool, and, indeed, the cunning serpent suited him admirably for his spiteful and evil purpose. — ² The serpent, into which the devil had entered, spoke. — ³ Satan did not betray his intention by saying at once: "Eat of the fruit", but he began by cunningly asking: "Why &c.?" in order that Eve might be induced to hesitate and question whether the prohibition to eat of the Tree of knowledge were a legitimate one, and whether God had really meant it. Eve knew that an ordinary snake can neither reason nor speak; so she must have known that it was some spirit who spoke through the serpent. She ought to have at once perceived that it was no good spirit who thus spoke, for an angel would not have questioned God's will, being quite certain that whatever He had commanded was for the best. Now, what ought Eve to have done? She ought either to have made no answer and fled, or she ought to have said: "God has willed it so. I do not ask why, because God knows best what is good for us." Instead of this, Eve let herself be drawn into conversation with the devil, and, thereby, he had already gained half his object. — ⁴ In order to raise a doubt about God's love, the father of lies exaggerated the prohibition, making it to apply to several trees instead of to one only. — ⁵ Why this command? So that they might keep away from even the occasion of sin. — ⁶ In this sentence there occur two remarkable words: "lest perhaps": for God had not said: "*Perhaps* you may die", and we can see by this answer of Eve's that she already half doubted whether God's threat had been meant seriously. — ⁷ Now the devil becomes more bold, and directly contradicts what God had said, making out the Lord God to be a liar! — ⁸ i. e. on the contrary. — ⁹ the eyes of their spirit. How had their eyes been closed hitherto? They possessed great knowledge, but all the same they knew nothing about sin; and therein lay their happiness. By holding out to Eve the prospect of attaining to a further knowledge, Satan wished to excite in her a sinful curiosity. — ¹⁰ not only like to God, but as God. By this lie the devil wished to make Adam and Eve proud. He represented Almighty God as a deceiver, Who withheld this knowledge from them, not out of love, but out of a jealous fear lest they should become like to Him. He wished to destroy Eve's faith in the love and truth of God, and arouse in her, instead, a mistrust of Him, pride, and sinful curiosity. Alas, he succeeded in his purpose. Instead of being indignant at Satan's blasphemous speech, Eve took pleasure in the prospect held out to her. She allowed a presumptuous desire and sinful curiosity to take possession of her heart; and because it promised so much to her, she now saw that the fruit of the tree was good and pleasant to behold. She longed for it now, and taking some, she ate, and then she persuaded Adam to eat of it also.

At the same time they lost sanctifying grace, which was the life of their soul; they lost the immortality of their

body; their eyes were opened¹¹, and they saw with shame that they were naked. In their shame and confusion they began to sew fig-leaves together, in order to cover their nakedness. But soon they heard the voice of God calling them, and they hid themselves among the trees¹². And God said: "Adam, where art thou?"¹³ And Adam answered: "I heard Thy voice, and I was afraid, because I was naked¹⁴, and I hid myself." And God said: "Who has told thee that thou art naked? Thou hast eaten of the forbidden fruit."¹⁵ Adam replied: "The woman whom Thou gavest me to be my companion, gave me of the fruit, and I did eat." And the Lord said to the woman: "Why hast thou done this?" She replied: "The serpent deceived me, and I did eat."¹⁶

¹¹ but not in the way they had intended. They knew evil, but the knowledge brought them no happiness, only restlessness, fear and misery. They now knew that they had been deceived, that they had sinned grievously, and had deserved punishment. Having lost their innocence, they were ashamed of being naked, and covered their bodies with fig-leaves. — ¹² It was formerly their greatest happiness, when God condescended to speak with them. Now, they trembled when they heard His voice and tried to hide themselves. We cannot hide ourselves from God, therefore, it was folly on their part to try to do so. From whence did this folly come? From sin. Sin blinds man and makes his understanding dull, so that he can no longer rightly understand the most elementary religious truths. — ¹³ This meant not only: In what place art thou? but also: In what condition art thou? What has happened to thee? Where is thine innocence? Where is thy good conscience? — ¹⁴ It was not only their bodies which were naked, but also their souls, which had lost their robe of innocence and sanctifying grace. — ¹⁵ Why did God ask this? Did He not already know what had taken place? Yes, but He wished Adam to confess his guilt. Adam did so; he acknowledged and did not deny his sin, but, at the same time, he excused himself and tried to lay the blame on Eve. She, in her turn, laid the blame on the serpent. — ¹⁶ Eve knew now that she had been deceived. The serpent had pretended that they would be much greater and happier through their disobedience, instead of which they already felt abased and miserable!

II. Commentary.

Sin. Adam and Eve transgressed the law of God. It is true that they were persuaded to do so, but still the devil did not force Eve to eat of the forbidden tree, nor did Eve

oblige Adam to do so. It was of their own free-will that they sinned.

The many ways in which we can sin. First, Eve sinned by *thought*. She doubted whether it were true that they must die, if they disobeyed God, and whether God meant what He had said. Then, she sinned by *desire*. First, she had a longing to be as God: this was a desire of pride. Then, she wished to eat of the fruit, because it looked good to eat: this was a desire of the flesh. As she gave way to this desire instead of stifling it, it grew to be a sin of *deed*: she put forth her hand, took the fruit and ate. Lastly, Eve sinned by *word*, when she gave utterance to a doubt about faith, saying: "Perhaps we shall die"; and also when she persuaded Adam to eat of the forbidden fruit.

Was their sin a grievous sin? Our first parents undoubtedly transgressed the law of God in an important matter, for the prohibition to eat of the fruit was the only law which God had given them, and, moreover, on its observance depended their own happiness and that of their descendants, for Almighty God had threatened them with death, if they disobeyed Him. They also transgressed the command wilfully, as explained above. Their sin was, therefore, a mortal sin, and a very grievous one. It was not only one sin but many. It was a sin of pride, of unbelief, of lust, of disobedience, and of ingratitude. God had shown them so much love and had given them so much that they owed Him the greatest gratitude; instead of which they repaid Him with the grossest ingratitude. Moreover, the command was one which they could easily have kept; for they were possessed of greater knowledge than we are, and knew God's infinite love, holiness and justice much better than we do.

The consequences of their sin were very grave. Satan had pretended to them that by their disobedience they would be raised, and become as God; but the very opposite took place. They were now less like God than they had been, because they had lost sanctifying grace and their other supernatural gifts. Having renounced God by their sin, they were no longer His children and heirs of heaven, but had

become children of the devil and heirs of hell! They still retained the natural gifts which made them like to God, but even these gifts were marred. Their reason was obscured, so that they could no longer recognize the truth as they had done; as was proved by the foolish way in which they tried to hide themselves from God. Their hearts and wills were now infected by evil; sinful inclinations were kindled in their hearts, of which they felt ashamed, and which made them hide themselves. Their happiness was gone. They were still in Paradise, and Paradise was as beautiful as ever, but they felt miserable, because their consciences were guilty and their hearts were full of fear and unrest. "Tribulation and anguish is on every soul of man that worketh evil" (Rom. 2, 9). Those only are happy who have a good conscience and the peace of God in their hearts. All the possessions in the world cannot make a man happy, if he has not got inward peace. A good conscience is the best of pillows!

Original sin. The sin of our first parents injured not only themselves, but also all their posterity. Their supernatural gifts were given to them not only for themselves, but for all those who were to come after them. If Adam and Eve had preserved these gifts, their children would have inherited them, and would have come into the world in a state of grace. But our first parents having sinned, and being no longer in a state of grace, their sinfulness has passed down to their children; so that now men are born into the world in a state of sin.

III. Application.

The devil induced Adam and Eve to sin by means of lies. Therefore our Lord says: "The devil is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8, 44). He is the father, i. e. the origin of lies. Have you never imitated him? Hate lies, for they come from the devil! Have nothing to do with them, or you will be a child of the devil. God is truth, and desires and loves only what is true. Stick to the truth, if you wish to be a child of God.

Perhaps you think that, if you had been in Eve's place, you would not have allowed yourself to be overcome by

temptation. But have you never, then, taken anything which you have been forbidden to take, such as sugar, fruit &c.? Has not God forbidden you to pilfer or to be greedy, quite as much as He forbade Adam and Eve to eat of the Tree of knowledge? Further, did not God give you sanctifying grace in holy Baptism? Has He not placed you in the paradise of His holy Church, in order that you may live a holy life and attain to the heavenly paradise? Have you not, by means of your religious instruction, acquired great knowledge, so that you know perfectly well what is right and what is wrong? Therefore, when you offend against the law of God, you are quite as little to be excused as was Eve. Guard, then, against sin and firmly resolve never again to offend God wilfully.

Eve's temptation came from without. We too, as long as we live, shall have to encounter various temptations. They come partly from without, such as those arising from bad companions and from positive occasions of sin, and partly from within, from our own bad inclinations, such as anger, sloth, self-will etc. They can also come from the direct suggestions of the evil one. Eve's fall should be a warning to us not to allow ourselves to be seduced by temptations to sin. Had Eve kept away from the forbidden tree, she would not have fallen! Keep away, therefore, from bad companions and sinful pleasures, or else you are meeting sin half way. If a bad thought occurs to you, do not dwell on it, but drive it from you, or else bad desires will follow bad thoughts. If the Tempter or your own passions whisper to you: "Such and such a thing would not be a great sin! God would not treat it severely!" Oh, then turn your thoughts at once to the just and holy God Who would be outraged by that sin, and remind yourself, that sin is the +greatest of all evils! Above all things, beware of sinful curiosity. He who wishes to see and hear everything, and who does not shut his eyes and ears, when he sees or hears anything evil, will soon have his heart corrupted, and will lose his innocence. Say often and devoutly: "Lead us not into temptation. Defend me, my God, against temptations to evil, or else give me the grace to resist them steadfastly!"

CHAPTER IV.

Part II.

THE FALL OF OUR FIRST PARENTS.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

THEN God said to the serpent¹: "Because thou hast done this thing², thou art cursed among all the beasts of the earth. Upon thy breast shalt thou go, and dust shalt thou eat all the days of thy life³. I will put enmities between thee and the woman, and thy seed and her seed; she shall crush thy head, and thou shalt lie in wait for her heel."⁴ This referred to the Saviour Who was one day to destroy the power of Satan. The woman mentioned is the Blessed Virgin Mary.

¹ Adam had laid the blame on Eve; and she had excused herself by pleading the deception of the serpent. As a matter of fact, all three were guilty, and on that account God pronounced sentence on each of them. He began, it is true, by the serpent who had beguiled the woman; He, then, proceeded to the woman who had led Adam into sin; and finished by Adam himself. The devil had received his supreme punishment, when he was cast down into hell with the other fallen angels; but, because he had deceived man and cheated him out of his happiness, God cursed him anew, and, with him, cursed the serpent which had been his instrument. — ² i. e. because you seduced Eve by your lies and deceit. — ³ These two first clauses of the divine sentence apply immediately to the actual serpent which had lent itself to be the devil's tool. Being cursed by God, it is hated by man on account of its creeping, cunning, and poisonous ways. But the words apply also to the devil, and signify that he and his followers would be degraded below all other creatures, and would crawl in the filth of sin and base passions, these being, as it were, the very breath of their life. — ⁴ These clauses are directed only against the invisible and infernal serpent, the devil. Satan had hoped that once he had succeeded in separating man from God, man would make friends with him, serve him, and remain in his power. But, instead of this, God announced that his very punishment would lie in being overcome by the woman. The seed of the devil are all those who give themselves over to sin. The seed of the woman is the Divine Saviour, Who, as Man, was descended from her. She, therefore, would tread on the head of Satan, would trample him under foot, and overcome him, taking away from him his power over man. But the serpent, i. e. the devil, would resist, and seek to injure the woman. He would not, however, materially injure her, but would lie in wait for her heel; in other words, he would prepare sufferings for her, but would not overcome her.—

Mary has overcome the devil through her Son, our Divine Redeemer, Who has saved the whole world from sin and from the power of Satan. But how, then, has the infernal serpent wounded her heel? The devil caused our Lord much suffering. He it was who prompted Judas to betray his Master. He it was who incited the Jewish priests and Pharisees to cry out: Crucify Him, crucify Him! The devil did this, and yet it is by our Lord's very death on the Cross that the devil has been overcome and the world redeemed!

To Eve He said⁵: "In sorrow and pain shalt thou bring forth thy children⁶. Thou shalt be subject to thy husband⁷, and he shall have dominion over thee." And to Adam He said⁸: "Because thou hast hearkened to the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee, that thou shouldst not eat, cursed is the earth in thy work⁹; with labour and toil shalt thou eat thereof all the days of thy life. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to thee. In the sweat of thy face thou shalt eat bread¹⁰, till thou shalt return to the earth, out of which thou wast taken; for dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return¹¹."

⁵ The sentence of punishment which Almighty God pronounced on Eve did not apply only to her, but to all women after her. — ⁶ i. e. in pain and anguish. — ⁷ Man would have dominion over woman, and she would have to serve and obey him. In pagan times, women were very degraded, and cruelly treated. It is only since the Incarnation, and the rise of Christianity, that the treatment of women has improved. —

⁸ The sentence that now follows, was pronounced on Adam and men after him. — ⁹ or, on account of your sin. Adam, the lord of the earth, having sinned, the curse upon him extended to all nature. As a consequence of the curse, the beasts, which, before the fall, were attached to man, have become either shy and intractable, or else positively ferocious towards him. Even the elements and forces of nature are very often hostile to him, and destroy the work of his hands. Moreover, the devil has obtained a certain dominion over them, and can injure man through them. — ¹⁰ i. e. it will be only by the most severe toil that you will be able to obtain bread, or, in other words, what is necessary for the life of yourself and your family. Thorns, thistles and all kinds of weeds grow naturally from the earth, but corn, which is the chief staple of man's food, can only be made to grow by means of the cultivation bestowed by man on the ground; and this cultivation requires very severe toil. — ¹¹ Man's body is made of the earth. The name Adam means "made of earth". He lost the gift of the immortality of the body, when he lost sanctifying grace. From henceforth his body was to be subject to death and to the diseases which



are the precursors of death. When he dies, his body turns to dust, mingling itself with the earth.

How great is the mercy of God, that He promised a Redeemer to our sinful parents! How hateful must sin be to God, since He pronounces so terrible a curse on those favoured creatures whom He has so recently blessed! When God had pronounced the sentence of banishment and death on Adam and Eve; when He had commanded the elements to oppress them in divers ways, He drove¹² them out of Paradise¹³, and placed Cherubim¹⁴ with a flaming sword, turning every way, to guard the way leading to the Tree of life.

¹² After He had clothed them with skins of beasts, both to cover their nakedness, and protect them against the rain and cold. Thus He did not quite forsake them, but came to their help in their necessity. — ¹³ What must have been their feelings, as they left Paradise! Look at the picture in the Bible History! — ¹⁴ Angels of one of the higher degrees, who were to prevent Adam and Eve from attempting to return to fetch of the fruit of the Tree of life. If they had partaken of this means of immortality in a state of sin, it could only have brought them damnation.

II. Commentary.

God is the very Truth. He had threatened Adam and Eve with death, if they ate of the forbidden fruit, and what He threatened was brought to pass. Of His mercy, Almighty God did not make our first parents die immediately, for they were not hardened in sin, and were capable of amendment; but, all the same, from that moment their bodies lost the supernatural gift of immortality, and their souls lost that grace which was their life.

The Justice of God. The punishment of Adam and Eve reveals to us the infinite justice of God. Their sin is the sin of the whole human race; therefore, the evil consequences of their sin have passed down to all mankind. We are by birth "children of wrath" (Eph. 2, 3). The image of God is defaced in each one of us. Our reason is obscured, our will is weakened, and the lusts of the flesh refuse to obey the spirit. We are all subject to suffering and death, and no one could attain to heaven, if our Divine Redeemer had not died for us.—Think of the many passions which hold sway over man! Think of the countless diseases to which he is prone; the countless tears which are shed by him! Think of the bitter pangs of the dying; and of the terrible disasters by fire, water and earthquake which occur! All this is the consequence of sin! How terrible, then, is the justice of Almighty God!

Sin is the greatest of all evils, for all other evils came into the world by sin.

Pride comes before the fall. Adam and Eve having sinned through pride, were humbled by the degrading sentence: "Dust thou art, and into dust thou shalt return."

The first promise of the Messias. Before Almighty God drove our first parents out of Paradise into the misery of the outside world, He gave them the promise of the Redeemer. The thought that by their sin they had condemned themselves to misery in this world and eternal ruin in the next, would have driven them to despair, had not God awakened in their hearts the hope of the coming of a Saviour. The curse pronounced on the infernal serpent contained a consolation for fallen man. The words: "I will put enmities

between thee and the woman &c.", told Adam and Eve that sin and the devil would be overcome some day, and that the gates of the heavenly paradise would be thrown open to them. We can see by this, how merciful God was even to fallen man. "The Lord is gracious and merciful, patient and plenteous in mercy" (Ps. 144, 8). God punishes man in mercy, and imposes temporal punishments on him, so as to save his soul and make him eternally happy.

The penalties of sin are also its remedies. Work, whether mental or physical, keeps evil desires and passions at bay. If men were not obliged to work, they would live more in accordance with their bad passions, and evil would be rampant. "Idleness hath taught much evil" (Ecclus. 33, 29). Furthermore, if there were no pain or death, men would sink into mere sensuality, would not trouble themselves about eternity, and would quite forget their higher destiny. Sickness and death are always preaching thus to us: "All earthly things pass away; take heed for the affairs of your soul!" On Ash-Wednesday the Church reminds us in an especial manner that we are but dust and ashes, and that we shall surely die.

Adam, a type of Jesus Christ (Rom. 5, 14). Adam is the father of all men according to the flesh; Jesus Christ is the spiritual Father of the faithful, for through Him alone do they receive life. Through Adam sin and death came to all men; through Jesus Christ we have received grace and eternal life. Sin and misery came into the world by Adam's disobedience; but our redemption has been wrought by Jesus Christ, Who became obedient even unto the death of the Cross.

Eve, a type of our Lady. Eve consented to sin; Mary consented to redemption, by consenting to become the Mother of the Redeemer. Eve, by her sin, brought misery on mankind; Mary, through her Son, has brought salvation. Eve was, in a natural sense, the mother of the living; Mary is so in a supernatural sense.

The Immaculate Conception. Mary trampled under foot the infernal serpent, not only by giving birth to the Divine Saviour, but also by this, that she was always free from

the stain of sin, even of original sin. Had she, like the rest of mankind, come into the world with the stain of original sin on her, she would have been, for a time, under the dominion of Satan, and her victory over him would not have been complete. Therefore God, by a special grace, and in view of the merits of her Divine Son, preserved her, whom He had chosen to be that Son's Mother, from the taint of original sin.

Why did not God cast Adam and Eve straight into Hell, as He did the fallen angels? Because, firstly, their sin, grievous as it was, was not so great as that of the rebellious angels, the angels being richer in grace and knowledge than were Adam and Eve; and, moreover, the fact of the fall of these last having been caused by the deception of Satan, was in some measure an excuse for them. Secondly, our first parents were not hardened in sin, but confessed their guilt and repented of it.

Adam and Eve not eternally lost. They received pardon on account of their belief in the future Saviour; and, on account of their repentance and long life of expiation, were delivered from Limbo by our Lord, and taken by Him to heaven. In the Book of Wisdom (10, 2) it is expressly said that the divine wisdom "drew him (Adam) out of sin".

The curse which, as a consequence of sin, rests on irrational creatures, is removed by the blessing which the Church, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, bestows on natural objects.

Unworthy Communion. Adam and Eve, being in a state of sin, did not dare to eat of the fruit of the Tree of life, for, had they done so, they would have been eternally damned. He who receives the Blessed Sacrament (which is prefigured by the Tree of life) in a state of sin, draws damnation on himself.

III. Application.

Sin is the greatest of all evils, and the source of all other evils. You are afraid of lesser evils, such as sickness, danger, or death; why are you so little afraid of the greatest of all evils? Guard against sin, for it leads to sorrow and misery. If you do right, you will have a joyful spirit, a good conscience, and peace and happiness in your innocent heart. But if you do wrong, your heart will be unhappy and uneasy, and the pains of conscience and fear will pursue you, as they pursued Adam and Eve after the fall. Therefore, set enmity between yourself and sin; detest it and flee from it. And often pray devoutly thus: "Deliver us from evil, from the greatest of all evils, sin!"

CHAPTER V.

CAIN AND ABEL.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

ADAM and Eve had many children; the first two were Cain and Abel. Cain was a husbandman, or tiller of the earth; Abel was a shepherd. Abel was just¹, but the works of Cain were evil. Now it happened one day that they offered a sacrifice² to God in gratitude for the benefits He had bestowed upon them. Abel offered the firstlings³ of his flock, and Cain, fruits of the earth. The Lord regarded Abel and his gifts with favour, but for Cain and his offerings He had no regard⁴. Seeing this, Cain was exceedingly angry, and his countenance fell⁵.

¹ He feared and loved God, and believed in the future Saviour. —

² i. e. visible gifts for the purpose of thanking God for the benefits already received, and of imploring further blessings from Him. —

³ i. e. the best and finest of his flock. — ⁴ We are not told how Almighty God gave His pleasure and displeasure to be understood. Probably, as at the sacrifice of Elias (Old Test. Ch. LXIII), He sent down fire from heaven, which consumed Abel's offering, whereas Cain's, notwithstanding every effort on his part, remained unconsumed. (See picture p. 35.) — ⁵ i. e. he became thin and pale with anger. Envy was the cause of his anger. He envied his brother for being in God's favour, and feared that he would receive greater benefits than himself. Instead of winning God's approval by contrition and amendment, he was seized with rage against his innocent brother although God lovingly warned him in time.

And the Lord said to Cain: "Why art thou angry, and why is thy countenance fallen?⁶ If thou do well, shalt thou not receive? but if ill, shall not sin forthwith be present at the door?⁷ Keep away from sin"⁸. But Cain did not heed the Lord⁹. One day he said to his brother: "Let us go forth abroad." Abel, suspecting no evil, went out with him; and when they were in the field, Cain rose up against Abel, his brother, and slew him.

⁶ By these questions God wished to bring Cain to self-knowledge, and a realization of the terrible condition of his soul. — ⁷ It will swiftly overtake you. — ⁸ i. e. do not let these evil passions of envy and anger master you, but subdue them at once and rule over them. —

⁹ He did not take God's warning to heart. He did not subdue his anger, and, therefore, it gained more and more mastery over him, till it grew into the fiercest hatred. He could no longer endure the sight of his brother, and at last resolved to kill him. His evil passions quite blinded him. He did not think of the grief, which his act would cause his parents, nor did he remember the threats of Almighty God. He enticed his brother into the field, and, turning on him, struck him dead.

What must Adam and Eve have felt, when they saw their dear Abel lying dead in his blood, slain by his own brother's hand! Perhaps, blinded by bitter tears, they exclaimed: "Alas, that we must survive this, our son's crime! Woe to us that we ever sinned! Cain has got his bad passions from us: This terrible deed is the consequence of our sin!"

The Lord said to Cain: "Where is thy brother Abel?"¹⁰ Cain replied in an insolent manner: "I know not; am I my brother's keeper?"¹¹ And the Lord said to him: "What hast thou done? The voice of thy brother's blood crieth to me from the earth¹². Now, therefore, cursed shalt thou be upon the earth, which hath opened her mouth and received the blood of thy brother from thy hand¹³. When thou shalt till it, it shall not yield to thee its fruit. A fugitive¹⁴ and a vagabond¹⁵ shalt thou be upon the earth."

¹⁰ By asking this question God wanted to give Cain the opportunity of honestly and contritely confessing his crime. Had he done so, God would have forgiven him and lessened his punishment. But instead of doing this, Cain made an insolent and defiant reply. — ¹¹ This was as much as to say: "Why dost thou ask me? I am not his keeper!" Being blinded by his passions, Cain believed that he could hide his crime from God, and defiantly lied to Him. After that, God reproached him for what he had done, and pronounced sentence on him. — ¹² Can blood cry out? Almighty God meant this: "Your evil deed is such that it demands punishment from heaven, or, in other words, it cries out to heaven for punishment and vengeance. — ¹³ i. e. thou hast with thine own hand shed thy brother's blood, which, flowing on to the ground, has been sucked up by it. — ¹⁴ Without a home. — ¹⁵ i. e. thou shalt never find rest, but shalt always wander to and fro on the earth.

And Cain, in despair, said to the Lord: "My iniquity is greater than that I may deserve pardon. Behold! Thou dost cast me out this day from the face of the earth. Every one, therefore, who findeth me, will kill me"¹⁶. The Lord said to him: "No, it shall not be so; but whosoever shall



kill Cain, shall be punished sevenfold”¹⁷. And He set a mark upon Cain that, whosoever found him, should not kill him¹⁸. And Cain went out from the face of the Lord, and dwelt as a fugitive on the earth¹⁹.

¹⁶ Cain’s defiance changed to despair. He believed that he could not obtain forgiveness, and despaired of God’s mercy. He would have liked to have hidden himself from God. Why did Cain wish to hide himself from God? Because he no longer regarded Him as a loving Father, but only as a severe Judge; and now, the thought of the presence of that God Whom he had so offended, was torture and terror to him. Having no longer any hope of attaining to eternal life, he clung the more anxiously to this earthly life, and was filled with dread, lest others should kill him, as he had killed Abel. As the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise had taken place about 120 years before, there were probably a great number of people on the earth by this time. — ¹⁷ It was God’s will to preserve the life of this murderer, in order that he might serve as a warning to other men. — ¹⁸ This mark was a sign on his face or brow, by which every one might know who Cain was, and that he was a man punished by the hand of God, and on account of his sins condemned to wander about on the earth, and who, being punished by God, might not be killed by any man. — ¹⁹ Weighed down by the curse of God, and tormented by his evil conscience, the fratricide led from thenceforward

a most miserable life. Day and night the image of his murdered brother was before his eyes, and he wandered to and fro on the earth, without comfort and without joy.

The punishment of Cain was threefold. In the selfishness of his envy he had believed that, if Abel were dead, he would, firstly, receive more blessings from God, secondly, that the earth would produce more under his cultivation, and, thirdly, that he himself would be happier. The exact opposite took place. Firstly, God cursed him. Secondly, the earth was barren under his touch. Thirdly, he was a prey to constant fear and unrest, and never knew another happy moment.

II. Commentary.

God is omniscient. God knew the minds of both Cain and Abel. He saw Cain's envy and bloodthirstiness, and knew what crime he had committed, even though Cain would not acknowledge it.

God is holy. Therefore the offering of the righteous Abel was well pleasing to Him, but He took no pleasure in the offering of the evil-minded Cain.

God is just. In what way did God show His justice in this story? First by the words: "If thou do well, shalt thou not receive," and those other words: "The voice of thy brother's blood crieth unto me." Also by the fact, that He punished the murderer most terribly.

Envy is a capital sin, because, as we have seen in the case of Cain, it leads to many other sins. To begin with; Cain was envious of his brother, and then, because he did not check this feeling, there grew up in his heart a fierce anger against Abel. He did not resist this anger, but rather cherished it, so that it turned into bitter hatred, and kindled in his heart the terrible desire to kill his brother. Then, as he did not resist this thirst for blood, it grew, until at last it led him to commit the horrible crime of fratricide.

Murder. The deadly blow, which Cain dealt Abel, was intentional and pre-meditated; and such an action is called murder. Cain was not only a murderer, but also a fratricide, i. e. the murderer of his brother.

The sins which cry to heaven for vengeance. We can see by this story of Cain and Abel, whence comes the expression of sins crying to heaven for vengeance. Wilful murder is

counted among them, because of the words of God: "The blood of thy brother crieth &c."

The forgiveness of sins. Is it true that Cain might have obtained forgiveness, if he had done penance? His sin was indeed great, but God's mercy is infinitely greater; and the murderer would have been forgiven by God, if he had but repented and confessed his terrible sin. Our faith teaches us explicitly that all sins can be remitted, if only they are confessed with the proper dispositions. It was Cain's own fault that he did not obtain forgiveness. He would not confess his sin, though God Himself questioned him. We cannot get our sins forgiven, unless we confess them. Cain, also, had no true contrition, and all hope of pardon depends on that. He, however, had given up hope, and despaired of God's mercy.

Free-will. There are those who yield to their evil passions, and then say that they could not help it. Is it true that they could not have helped it? Could not Cain have acted differently from what he did? God Himself had said to him: "Keep away from sin." We are not obliged to follow our evil inclinations, for we have free-will, and can overcome our passions, if we choose.

The necessity of grace. Grace is, however, necessary to enable the free-will of man to choose what is right. Cain had received quite sufficient grace, and if he had corresponded with it, he would have been quite able to overcome his envy and hatred, and would never have become a murderer. Even after his sin he would have been able to obtain pardon, if he had not resisted the grace of God which urged him to repent.

The wonderful working of divine Grace for the good of man, is shown to us very plainly in this story of Cain. Think how much God did both to keep him from sinning, and to bring him to repentance, after he had sinned, so that his soul might be saved. First, He drew Cain's attention to his ruling passions of envy and anger, in order to bring him to a knowledge of himself. Then, He promised him a reward and blessing, if he would correct himself, and threatened him with speedy punishment, if he let himself be led on to do an evil deed. Lastly, He stirred him up, and exhorted him not to be led away by his evil desires, but to have dominion over them. Even after the

terrible deed was done, Almighty God did not at once reject the murderer, and even while reproaching him for his crime, tried to move his heart. He wished Cain to recognise the horror of his deed, to abhor it, and repent of it. He even asked him where his brother was, in order to make the confession of his guilt easier to him. It was only when Cain proved to be hard-hearted and impenitent that God pronounced judgment on him. Even then, the sentence was not an eternal one; it was only temporal ("cursed be thou on the earth"), and might have led him to repentance and amendment. God protected the life of this wretch by a special mark, in order to give him more time for repentance. Oh, how good and merciful is God, Who, as it were, pursues the sinner so indefatigably, and tries in so many ways to move his heart, so as to save him from eternal damnation!

Resistance of Grace. Sins against the Holy Ghost. Man, having free-will, is able to resist grace, which, much as it may move him and incline him towards what is good, does not force him. Cain's terrible example shows us to what resistance of grace can lead. He would not listen to God's loving exhortation to overcome his envy and anger, but cherished them in his heart, till his anger waxed fiercer and turned to hatred, and, finally, led him to murder his own brother. Once again, after his crime, Cain resisted the promptings of God's grace. He hardened his heart and sinned directly against God by his lies, defiance and impenitence. It was only after God had pronounced sentence on him, and he already felt its effects, that he acknowledged his guilt. He did not, however, implore for pardon contritely and confidently, but despaired of God's mercy. Which of the sins against the Holy Ghost did he commit? First, he envied his brother on account of the grace God had given him; secondly, he hardened his heart against God's admonitions; and, finally, he despaired of God's mercy.

A right intention is the chief thing. St. Paul says (Hebr. 11, 4): "By faith Abel offered to God a sacrifice exceeding that of Cain." What was wanting in Cain's sacrifice? His faith in God and in the promised Saviour was not firm and living, and, therefore, his worship of God was wanting in reverence and thankfulness. He worshipped Him outwardly, but not inwardly. The gifts, which he offered, were good, but the intention with which he offered them, was not good. Let us learn from this that God does not look merely on our outward works and gifts, but that He looks especially to our intention. "The Lord seeth the heart" (Old Test. Ch. I).

The worship of God by sacrifice. Cain and Abel both brought gifts to God. What did they offer? Fruits and beasts. How did they offer these visible gifts? They burnt them, i. e. destroyed them by fire. They wished to express by this that they kept back nothing of these gifts for themselves, that they desired to offer them wholly to God, from Whom all good things come, and to Whom all things belong. From whom had Cain and Abel learnt how to offer sacrifice to God?

Obviously, from their parents, Adam and Eve. We see, therefore, that men offered sacrifice to God from the very first: that so long as there have been men to worship Him, there have been sacrifices. Sacrifice is the highest and most perfect form of worship, and is essential to religion. The Catholic religion, being the most holy and perfect of all religions, must possess the most holy and perfect of sacrifices. What is this holiest sacrifice, most pleasing to God? It is Jesus Christ Himself, Who once sacrificed Himself on the Cross in a bloody manner, and Who continually offers Himself for us in the Holy Mass in an unbloody manner.

Abel is the second type of Jesus Christ. Abel was just; a shepherd; envied by his brother; slain by him; and his blood cries for vengeance. Jesus Christ is the Most Just; and the Good Shepherd of mankind. Out of envy He was persecuted and slain by His brethren, the Jews. His Blood cries for grace and pardon for sinful man.

The homeless, wandering *Cain is a type of the Jewish people*, who resisted God's grace, and who, since they slew their God, have been homeless and scattered over the whole earth.

Eve, weeping over the body of her beloved son, slain by the hand of his brother, *is a type of the sorrowful Mother of God*, who stood, sorrowing, at the foot of the Cross, on which hung her Divine Son, slain by his brethren, the Jews.

III. Application.

Envy is very easily aroused in our hearts. Have you never felt envious, when others have been praised or rewarded? Detest envy, and overcome all temptations to it, for it is a hateful sin, and the source of many other sins. "Through the envy of the devil death came into the world, and they follow him who are of his side" (2 Wisd. 24, 25). If you let envy get possession of you, you are imitating the devil, and are his child. Do you wish to be a child of the devil? If not, be not envious and jealous of others, but rather rejoice, when good befalls them. Drive away envy, for from envy came the first murder.

The divine admonition to overcome the desire to sin applies to every body. If God required of Cain that he should master his evil desires, how much more does He require it of us, Christians, to whom so many graces have been given! Examine yourself and see what sin you are most inclined

to, whether it be lying, or greediness, or laziness, or disobedience, or anger, or sinful curiosity, and resolve never to give way to it, but to overcome it at once. Resist the beginnings of sin. If Cain had stifled his envy in the beginning, he would not have become a fratricide! God warns you through your conscience, your parents &c, in the same way that He warned Cain. Do not resist these warnings, or you will grow up hard-hearted.

If you have sinned through thoughtlessness or weakness, go at once and confess your sin to the priest, who is the representative of God, and God will forgive you. He who does not make a good confession, is hard-hearted like Cain.

CHAPTER VI.

THE DELUGE.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

ADAM lived nine hundred and thirty years. He had many sons and daughters to whom he announced the law of God and the coming of the Redeemer¹. His immediate descendants also lived to a very great age. Mathusala, the oldest of them, lived nine hundred and sixty-nine years. The people became very numerous. Some were herdsmen and lived in tents; others built cities and became mechanics and musicians². The descendants of the pious Seth, whom God had given to Adam instead of Abel³, were good, feared God, and hence were called the children of God. The descendants of Cain, however, turned away from God⁴, were wicked, and were called the children of men.

¹ The promise that one day a Saviour should come, Who would overcome sin and the devil. — ² They practised various arts and trades, such as building, stone-cutting, carpentering, weaving, forging, and the making of musical instruments. — ³ That is to say that Seth, being just and holy like Abel, was a compensation to his parents for his loss. God chose Seth to be the heir of the promises, and the forefather of the people of God, and, later on, of the Redeemer Himself, Who, according to St. Luke (3, 38) was, as Man, descended from Seth. — ⁴ i. e. they did not seek God or serve Him. They were called sons of men, or of this world, in contradistinction to the

children of the just Seth who were called the sons of God, because they loved and honoured God as their Lord and Father.

Enoch, one of the children of God, was noted for his faith and piety⁵, and was taken up alive to heaven⁶. Unhappily, the children of God began to associate with the children of men, and soon they themselves became wicked. Then God said that men must not live so long, seeing that they have become corrupt in their ways. "His days shall be one hundred and twenty years"⁷.

⁵ He "walked with God", i. e. lived in God's presence, prayed without ceasing, and was united to God by the most intimate love. He was the saint of the primitive ages. His zeal for the glory of God, and his sincere love of his neighbour, urged him to convert sinners, so as to save them from eternal loss. — ⁶ He did not die, but was translated to paradise with his body and soul, as happened later on to the prophet Elias. He, too, was a holy preacher of penance, and was translated without dying. — ⁷ In the course of centuries, the children of God intermarried with the children of men, and let themselves be led into their godless ways, so that impiety increased, and at last became general. Then God resolved to exterminate the human race, which was now living so shamelessly in accordance with its own evil passions. But He gave them a hundred and twenty years for repentance and amendment.

The wickedness of men went on increasing, and their thoughts⁸ were continually bent upon evil. Seeing this, God said⁹: "I will destroy man, whom I have created, from the face of the earth."

⁸ All their thoughts and desires were bad. — ⁹ It is said that it "repented God" of having made man. It repents us men, when we have done something wrong or stupid. God cannot have such repentance, because He is unchangeable, and cannot wish to alter anything He has done. What then do the words mean? They mean that the depravity of man was so horribly great that God, Who cannot really repent, seemed to repent that He had created the human race.

But among these wicked men there was one just and virtuous man, who was called Noe. Noe found favour with the Lord¹⁰, and the Lord said to him: "Make thee an ark¹¹ of timber-planks¹²; thou shalt make little rooms in the ark, and thou shalt pitch it within and without with bitumen. The length of the ark shall be three hundred cubits, and

the breadth of it fifty cubits, and the height of it thirty cubits¹³. Thou shalt make a window in the ark, and a door in its side; and thou shalt divide the ark into lower, middle, and third¹⁴ stories. Behold, I will bring the waters of a great flood upon the earth, to destroy all flesh wherein is the breath of life. But I will establish my covenant¹⁵ with thee. Thou shalt enter into the ark, thou and thy sons, and thy wife and the wives of thy sons with thee. And of every living creature, of all flesh, thou shalt bring two of a sort¹⁶ into the ark that they may live with thee. Thou shalt take unto thee of all food which may be eaten, and thou shalt lay it up with thee."

¹⁰ It was God's will to spare him, and not punish the just with the unjust. — ¹¹ A great house, resting on a sort of raft (see picture). — ¹² Of wood, shaped and fitted together. — ¹³ The Hebrew cubit was about 18 inches. — ¹⁴ or upper. — ¹⁵ Of what did this bond or covenant consist? Almighty God promised to save Noe in the ark; and Noe, on his part, undertook to serve God faithfully, with his family. — ¹⁶ Of clean beasts he was to take seven pair. Those beasts were styled clean, which lived on herbage; and especially domestic animals were thus classed. Only clean beasts could be offered in sacrifice. Unclean beasts, included (besides swine) all beasts of prey (because they shed blood), all vermin and creeping things.

Noe did all that the Lord had commanded him to do. He spent a hundred years in building the ark¹⁷, during which time he preached penance to the people¹⁸. But men heeded not the warning. They ate, drank, and were married just as before, without a thought of the terrible punishment that was to come upon them. Then the Lord said to Noe: "Go in, thou and all thy house, into the ark; and after seven days I will cause rain to fall upon the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will destroy every substance that I have made, from the face of the earth." Noe entered into the ark, with all his family, taking with him all that the Lord had commanded him¹⁹; and the Lord shut him in on the outside.

¹⁷ With the help of his sons. — ¹⁸ foretelling the coming punishment. The building of the ark ought to have confirmed his words, for each person must have said to himself: "Surely Noe would never have undertaken this great and laborious work, if he did not believe in



this coming judgment." But they would not allow any serious thoughts to interfere with their impious frivolity, and went on with their pleasure, refusing to believe Noe's words, and scoffing at his warnings. Thus, they let the hour of grace go by without profiting by it. — ¹⁹ God made the animals to flock into the ark in the same way that He gathered them together to be named by Adam, and in the same way that He still draws the birds of passage every year towards the south.

And when the seven days were passed, the fountains of the great deep ²⁰ were broken up, and the flood-gates of heaven were opened ²¹, and the rain fell upon the earth for forty days and forty nights. The waters continued to increase till they rose fifteen cubits above the highest mountains. Thus every living being was destroyed, that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, of cattle, of beasts, and all men. Noe only remained, and they that were with him in the ark.

²⁰ That is, the waters under the earth came to the surface. — The water which was gathered in the air, and which God kept back as it were, by flood-gates, broke loose and poured on to the earth. Many of you have seen flood-gates or sluices in a mill stream, and you know what the water does, when they are opened. In the same way, the water burst out of the clouds, and poured unceasingly on to the earth for forty days.

Picture to yourselves the horror of this terrible judgment of God. In sixteen hundred years the human race had increased to millions of beings, and now all were destroyed! Many of them were drowned when the Flood first began, while others saved themselves for a time in high trees or on the roofs of houses. But the houses were swept away and the trees uprooted, and all who were on them were swallowed up in the waters. Many fled to the mountains, but the flood followed them there. With deadly fear they watched the waters rising higher and higher, till the very mountain-tops were swallowed up, and one by one those who had sought safety on them were engulfed in the roaving waves. Mothers saw their children, brothers their sisters, husbands their wives, drowning before their eyes, and were powerless to help them. Black clouds covered the sky, and the earth was wrapped in darkness. Beasts roared, and men wailed and cried aloud to heaven for mercy. But the day of mercy was passed; the day of retribution had come. And, behold, while the storm raged fiercer and fiercer, and the waters rose above the highest mountains, burying all mankind in a watery grave, the ark floated securely on the top of the horrible flood, protected by the hand of God, neither injured by the fallen trees which were hurled against it, nor dashed to pieces against the sunken rocks.

II. Commentary.

The four last things. The patriarchs lived to a great age, but they had to die at last. Of each one, with the exception of Enoch, it is said that he lived to such and such an age, and then died. By this they fulfilled the words of God: "Dust thou art and into dust thou shalt return." So it is with man still, and so it will be till the end of the world: all men must die, because they are the inheritors of Adam's curse. "It is appointed unto men once to die, and after this the judgment" (Hebr. 9, 27). The last thing we shall do on earth will be to die.

The sons of God and the sons of men. The opposition between the sons of God and the sons of men continues to this day, and will continue to the end of the world. The children of men are those who either have no faith, or who do not live up to their faith, but follow the dictates of their own hearts, and without shame transgress God's commandments. They love the world above all things, instead of loving God. They struggle after the honours, pleasures, and riches of this life, and do not trouble themselves about eternal

life. But who are the children of God? They are those who do God's will, who live in the grace and love of God, and who strive after heavenly things. As Christians, we are all children of God. Let us live as such, and try to do the will of our Father, Who is in heaven.

The long life of the Patriarchs. As the earth before the Flood produced larger plants and larger beasts than it does now, so men in primeval times were taller and stronger than the men of later ages. They lived a simple, temperate life, and therefore reached a great age. This long life of the patriarchs was ordained by God to serve several ends. The first was that they might have a great many children, and that the human race might multiply and spread itself. Another was that they, the patriarchs, might be able to transmit the divine revelation of the history of creation, of the original state and fall of man, the promise of the Saviour, the story of Cain and Abel &c., to later generations, pure and unfalsified. Adam himself was able to teach these truths to his descendants down to the time of Lamech, who at the time of Adam's death was fifty years old. Lamech was the father of Noe, and died a few years before the Deluge. He instructed Noe (who lived 950 years) and Sem, the son of Noe. Sem (who lived 600 years) was able to instruct his descendants down to the time of Jacob. Jacob transmitted the divine revelation to his descendants, one of whom was Moses, who wrote the first five books of Holy Scripture, containing the revelation of God from the Creation onwards. There was no Holy Scripture between the time of Adam and that of Moses; the faith being preserved and spread by means of oral tradition.

The Forbearance of God. Although all men, with the exception of Noe and his family, had become impious and vicious, God gave them a hundred years in which to repent, before He let loose His wrath upon them. We call God long-suffering, because He waits such a long time, before He will punish a sinner. Good men often complain thus: Why does God put up so long with impiety? Why does not He punish the sinner who defies Him? Almighty God is patient, because He is eternal. He waits for the sinner to repent; but if he will not repent, the punishment falls at last, if not in this world, then in the world to come.

God's Holiness and Justice shine forth most clearly in this story. The sins of men were powerless to hurt the Lord God, or disturb His infinite complacency. Why then did it

repent Him that He had made man? Because He is holy, and, sin being opposed to His very essence, He could no longer endure the wickedness of man. He also wished, by this destruction of sinful man, to reveal His detestation of sin to all future generations, and to keep them, thereby, from sinning. Because God is holy, He is also just, as is shown by His reward of the righteous Noe, and his punishment of the wicked.

The Mercy of God. God reveals to us His mercy as well as His justice in this story of the Deluge. He did not allow the Flood to come suddenly, but by degrees. When the rain began to fall, it is probable that many believed in Noe's warnings of the coming judgment and began to pray and repent of their sins, and cried to God for pardon. Such as did this were saved, and were not consigned to hell, but to Limbo (1 Pet. 3, 19).

S "Others do the same thing." Sinners often speak thus in excuse for themselves. But the Deluge teaches us that such words avail nothing with God. Sin remains sin, and mortal sin remains mortal sin, never mind how many commit it as well as yourself. When everybody was wicked, as in the days of Noe, everybody was punished. At the Last Day we shall not be judged according to the opinions and easy-going principles of the world, but according to the holy Commandments of God and of His Church.

Among all his other virtues we must admire most the *fortitude of Noe*. He remained virtuous in the midst of a corrupt world, and did only that which was pleasing to God. The wicked people around him did all in their power to lead him astray. They mocked him, because he did not do as they did; but he did not let himself be moved to do evil. He firmly resisted the attractions of the wicked world, and remained true to what was right.

I want to call your attention to *Noe's love of his neighbour*. For a hundred and twenty years he laboured for the salvation of the souls of his fellow creatures, who were walking on the road to ruin. His love of his neighbour was real, practical, and entire.

The Ark is a type of the Catholic Church. All those who were in the ark, were saved from death: whosoever is a true child of the Catholic Church, will be saved from everlasting death. There was only one ark of safety: so is there only one true Church in which is salvation. The ark was designed and built according to God's directions: so was the Church founded by our Lord. The ark did not sink amid the storms of the Deluge, being protected and guided by God: even so the Catholic Church does not sink amid the storms of persecution, being invisibly protected and governed by God the Holy Ghost.

The Last Judgment. The terrors of the Deluge are a type of the Last Day, for our Lord has said (Mat. 24, 37): "As in the days of Noe so shall also the coming of the Son of man be" (i. e. when He comes again to judge the world). Great were the fear and lamentation when the Deluge broke forth, but greater far will be the terror felt at the approach of the Lord. "There shall be then great tribulation such as hath not been from the beginning of the world until now" (Mat. 24, 21). And yet many men behave about the Last Judgment precisely as those of Noe's time behaved about the Deluge, passing their lives in frivolity, and fearing nothing. The very same thing which happened to these last will happen to them. The men of Noe's time would not listen to his warnings: they scoffed at him and refused to believe in the judgment that was to overtake them. But when the Flood came, and certain destruction lay before them, they cursed their folly and frivolity, and bitterly envied Noe's safety in the ark. So will it be with men, when the Last Day comes. "Then will they say within themselves, repenting and groaning for anguish of spirit: These are they whom we had some time in derision, and for a parable of reproach. We fools esteemed their life madness, and their end without honour. Behold, how they are numbered among the children of God, and their lot is among the saints" (Wisd. 5, 3—5).

III. Application.

You became children of God by holy Baptism. Have you always lived as such? Have you always prayed willingly and devoutly, and hated sin? Think very often about God, Who is everywhere, and sees into your hearts. Enoch took delight in meditating about God. Wherever he went, and whatever he was doing, he had God before his eyes. Each time to-day that you hear the clock strike, or the bell ring, make short acts of faith, hope and charity.

The children of God became corrupt, because they mixed with the children of the world. Man, being naturally inclined to evil, follows bad example very easily. "Evil communications

corrupt good manners.” One bad apple taints a hundred sound ones, but a hundred sound apples cannot make the bad one good again. Beware, in future, of bad companions. They are not true friends, but are the enemies of your soul. Seek the company of pious, god-fearing people. “My son, if sinners shall entice thee, consent not to them” (Prov. 1, 10).

Noe’s preaching was all in vain, because the frivolous people heard him indeed with their ears, but did not take to heart what he said. In what way do you listen to sermons and instructions?

Noe feared God, but did not fear the impious world. Very often you fear men more than God. Have you never been ashamed to make the sign of the cross, or to kneel down to say your prayers, or to take holy water? Do not ever again be so cowardly! Pay no attention to the scoffs of bad people, but be strong, and fearlessly confess your faith! Pray earnestly to God the Holy Ghost for the gifts of fortitude and holy fear!

CHAPTER VII.

NOE’S OFFERING—HIS CHILDREN.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

NOW God remembered¹ Noe, and sent a wind upon the earth. This moved the waters, and after a hundred and fifty days they began to abate. At length, the ark rested upon a mountain in Armenia, called Mount Ararat, and the tops of the hills began to appear². Noe perceived this with great joy, for he had been now three hundred and fifty days shut up in the ark.

¹ Had God then forgotten Noe all this time? No; the words “God remembered Noe” are as much as to say that, out of loving care for Noe, He made the wind to blow, so that he might be soon able to leave the ark in which he was shut up. — ² This was a chain of mountains in Asia, south of the Caucasus, between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea. The highest mountain in the chain is 17,230 feet high, and is called Ararat, which, in Persian, means the “mountain of Noe”, because it was on it that the ark of Noe rested. Naturally,



the waters sank slowly. When the tops of the mountains were uncovered, Noe had been 220 days in the ark, and it was a very long time after that, before the level parts of the earth were dry.

In order to see whether the waters had subsided on the earth, he opened the window and sent forth a raven which did not return³. He next sent forth a dove, but she, not finding a spot whereon to rest her foot, returned to the ark. After seven days he again sent forth the dove. She came back to him, in the evening, carrying in her mouth a bough of an olive-tree with green leaves⁴. Noe, therefore, understood that the waters had abated from off the face of the earth. He stayed in the ark yet other seven days, and he sent forth the dove again, which did not return to him⁵.

³ It found quite enough food among the dead bodies floating about, and was able to settle on the mountain-tops. It had, therefore, no wish to return to the confinement of the ark. — ⁴ i. e. a branch off an olive-tree, from the fruit of which sweet oil is made. Noe perceived by this that the earth, or at any rate the slopes of Mount Ararat, on which olive-trees grow, were dry. — ⁵ She did not return, because by this time the plains were dry. Noe, however, did not leave the

ark of his own accord, but waited for the command of God to Whose guidance he had entirely yielded himself.

God then said to Noe: "Go out of the ark." So Noe went out of the ark with his wife, his sons and their wives, together with all the living creatures which he had placed in it⁶. Filled with gratitude towards the Lord Who had so wonderfully preserved him, he built an altar⁷ to the Lord and offered on it a sacrifice of clean animals⁸. The sacrifice of Noe was pleasing to the Lord. He blessed Noe and his sons, and said to them: "Increase and multiply, and fill the earth"⁹. God made a covenant with Noe that He would never again destroy the earth with water. The rainbow, which we see in the clouds, is the sign of this covenant between God and the earth¹⁰.

⁶ Noe was more than a year in the ark (compare Gen. 7, 2 and 8, 14). What must he have felt, when he once more trod on the earth! Whichever way he turned, there was desolation and death: no living creature to be seen, no house nor human habitation! Scattered about were the bones of those who had been drowned: the whole earth was one vast graveyard! Sorrow filled his heart, when he thought of the terrible end of those who had perished; but thankfulness, inexpressible thankfulness, rose up within his soul, as he said to himself: "What would have become of me and mine, if God had not so mercifully taken care of me! — ⁷ of stones. — ⁸ of those species of animals of which seven pair had been taken into the ark. —

⁹ Almighty God had said these same words, when He blessed Adam and Eve. Noe, being the second parent of the human race, God gave him and his sons the same blessing, and in the same words. —

¹⁰ The covenant was a covenant of friendship. Almighty God promised to be gracious to man, and never more to send a Deluge on the earth, or let the succession of seasons, interrupted by the Flood, be again upset. The rainbow was to be a sign of this covenant, and remind us of God's mercy and promises.

The sons of Noe were Sem, Cham and Japhet¹¹. Now, Noe began to cultivate the earth. He planted a vineyard, and, drinking of the wine, he fell asleep¹², and was uncovered in his tent¹³. Cham, seeing his father in this condition¹⁴, spoke of it in a jesting way to his brothers. They, however, filled with a chaste and holy fear, put a cloak upon their shoulders, and, going backwards¹⁵ so as not to look upon

him where he lay, covered their father's nakedness. And Noe, awaking and hearing what had happened, said: "Cursed be Chanaan; a servant of servants shall he be unto his brethren." But he blessed Sem and Japhet. Children should learn from this example not to mock or ridicule their parents.

¹¹ From these three all mankind descended. The children of Sem spread principally through Asia, those of Cham through Africa, and those of Japhet through Europe. — ¹² sufficiently intoxicated to sleep an uneasy sleep. During his restless movements, the covering fell from his body. But how came holy Noe to be drunk? For drunkenness is a sin! He did not drink too much wine intentionally, but through ignorance, not knowing the potency of wine. — ¹³ He had no house, only a tent which could be easily taken down and carried away. On page 86 of the Bible History you will find tents of this kind represented; which were such as were used by the Israelites during their journey through the wilderness. — ¹⁴ He gazed without shame on his father's uncovered body, and went and told his brothers mockingly what had happened, so that they too might go and mock their father. — ¹⁵ So that they might have their faces turned, not towards Noe's couch, but towards the entrance of the tent.

II. Commentary.

The Goodness of God. Almighty God, in His loving mercy, remembered not only Noe, but the beasts in the ark; for He hateth nothing that He hath made. We, too, should be merciful, and carefully avoid cruelty to animals. He who wantonly illtreats dumb beasts, proves that he has a hard, cruel heart.

God's Faithfulness. Just as the punishment with which God threatened sinful man, was brought to pass in the most terrible way, so the promise which He made after the Deluge, never again to destroy the world by water, has been kept for more than four thousand years.

Confidence in God. In Noe we have a glorious example of this virtue. Full of a living faith in God's presence, wisdom and power, he gave himself over entirely to the direction of divine providence. Full of confidence in God, and in complete submission to His will, he built the ark and shut himself up in it; nor did he leave it, till God Himself told him to do so. Fear might very well have seized him, and he might very well have asked himself how the animals would

fare in the ark, and so forth: and when the ark was driven about hither and thither, the anxious thought of how long it would be able to resist the beating of the waves, might very well have occurred to him. But he allowed no such fears to take possession of him, and confided himself entirely to the Lord God and His holy word. Belief in the wisdom and power of the ever present God ought to fill us also with courage and comfort in time of tribulation, and make us trust in God, and be content with whatever He wills. "Commit thy way to the Lord, and trust in Him, and He will do it" (Ps. 36, 5). He who puts his trust in God, builds on a sure foundation.

Gratitude to God. Why was God well pleased with Noe's sacrifice? Firstly, because it was offered with faith in the future Saviour; and, secondly, because it was offered in thanksgiving. You see, in the picture in your Bible History, how Noe and his family knelt round the altar, praying with fervour and devotion, thanking God from the bottom of their hearts, and promising Him that they would serve Him all the days of their life, and avoid those sins which had called down such a terrible punishment. Gratitude to God is a holy and essential part of our worship of Him.

The reward of gratitude. Noe's thankfulness pleased the Lord God, so that He gave him still greater blessings. When we thank God for benefits we have received, we prepare the way for new benefits.

The olive-branch, brought back to the ark by the dove, showed those who were inside that the destruction on the earth had ceased, and that the time of their liberation was at hand. On this account, the olive-branch has ever since been a token of peace and joy.

The meaning of sin. Was Noe's drunkenness a sin? For is not intemperance in drink one of the seven deadly sins? Then why was not Noe's drunkenness a sin, or any how not a grievous sin? Because Noe did not get drunk wilfully, or intentionally.

Intemperance. Noe's drunkenness was excusable, because he was ignorant of the strength of wine. This is now known to everybody, so that it is a great sin to drink enough to obscure the senses and

reason. Drunkenness leads to many other sins, such as quarrelling, fighting, swearing &c., and is, therefore, one of the capital sins. Man may drink wine &c. in moderation, for the purpose of refreshing and strengthening himself. But children should never drink wine, and, still less, spirits. Such drink is unwholesome for children, and those who indulge in it, are pale and sickly, and often stupid and stunted in their growth. But milk and bread make rosy cheeks!

Cham's sin. What Commandments did Cham sin against? First, against the sixth Commandment, by his immodesty. Secondly, against the fourth Commandment. Cham scoffed at, and failed in respect to his father, and spoke evil of him, by needlessly repeating to his brothers what he had seen. What ought Cham to have done, when he accidentally found his father in that state? He ought to have turned away his eyes, covered up his father, and not told any one about it.

The blessing and curse of parents. When Noe learnt about Cham's conduct, he pronounced a curse on him and his descendants, and promised a blessing to Sem and Japhet. He foresaw, by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, that Cham's descendants would, like those of Cain, turn away from God, and be punished by Him. The African negroes are descended from him, and they are to this day sunk in the lowest state of superstition, governed by cruel tyrants, treated as slaves, and often bought and sold as such. Their way of living is very barbarous, and they are very hard to convert to Christianity. The blessing on Sem and Japhet and their children has been fulfilled as completely, as has been the curse on Cham. Sem was the heir of the divine promise, for the chosen people of God sprang from him, and of his race was born the Messias. The children of Japhet formed great and powerful nations, and were early converted to Christianity, some of them even in the time of the apostles. You can see by this story that children who are wanting in respect to their parents, are punished by God, but that those who love and honour them, are blessed and rewarded by Him.

Detraction. Just as Sem and Japhet covered their father's nakedness with a cloak, so ought we to cover the faults of our fellow men with the mantle of charity, and never reveal

them except in case of necessity. You commit the sin of detraction, if you reveal the sins of others without necessity.

Noe, the third type of Jesus Christ. Noe was the only just man in a sinful world: Jesus Christ is alone, and of and by Himself, most just, most holy. Noe built the ark for the saving of the human race: Jesus Christ founded the Church in order that men might in her find salvation. Noe preached penance and foretold the Deluge: our Lord preached penance and foretold the Last Judgment. Noe offered a sacrifice to God, which was so well pleasing to Him that He made a covenant with him and his posterity: our Lord, by His death on the Cross, offered the most perfect sacrifice, and obtained for all men pardon, grace and everlasting peace. Noe was the second father of the human race: Jesus Christ is the spiritual Father of all who believe in Him.

III. Application.

Say a hearty "Deo gratias" (God be thanked), whenever any piece of good fortune befalls you, as, for instance, when you find something you had lost, or succeed in some undertaking. As Noe's first act on leaving the ark was one of thanksgiving, so let your first act, when you wake in the morning, be one of thanksgiving.

Noe was saved in the ark on account of his justice. What have you done to deserve being received into the one ark of salvation, the Church, almost as soon as you were born? Thank God very often for having made you a member of the one true Church. There is, as says St. Augustine, no greater treasure than the Catholic faith.

Cham's conduct was very wrong. Would it not be wrong of you to look at anything indecent? Be on your guard, therefore, against curious looks, and be modest in dressing and undressing.

Honour your father and your mother. Do not despise them, even if they have faults. "The eye that mocketh at his father or that despiseth his mother, let the ravens of the brooks pick it out, and the young eagles eat it" (Prov. 30, 17).

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TOWER OF BABEL.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

THE descendants of Noe soon multiplied ¹, and again became as wicked as men had been before the Deluge. Now, they were unable to live together any longer ², and they said: "Come, let us make a city and a tower, the top whereof may reach to heaven; and let us make our name famous, before we be scattered abroad in all lands" ³. But God frustrated their foolish design. He said: "Let Us confound their tongue that they may not understand one another's speech" ⁴. Till then there had been but one language spoken amongst men. So the Lord scattered them from that place into all the lands, and they ceased to build the city. Therefore, the city was called Babel ⁵ which signifies confusion ⁶, because there the language of the whole earth was confounded.

¹ They had left the mountains of Armenia, and dwelt in the large, fruitful plain between the Euphrates and the Tigris. — ² God decreed that they should disperse, and to this decree they objected. — ³ They wished to found an united kingdom, the centre and fortress of which should be this city with its high tower. — ⁴ God introduced various languages among them. Hitherto they had all spoken one language, because they were all the children, first, of Adam, and, then, of Noe. In the course of time, with the extension of the human race and the development of nationalities, this one original language would probably have split itself into divers dialects, just as the mental and physical development of the race would have differed according to the different localities in which they were placed. But in order to punish their presumption and compel them to disperse, God now made various languages to spring up among them, suddenly and in a wonderful manner, while they were still all together, and at work building their tower. They could no longer understand each other, and had to give up their undertaking and separate into different bodies. — ⁵ or Babylon. Among the ruins of this once great city the stupendous foundations of a tower are still to be seen, which are considered to be the remains of the Tower of Confusion. — ⁶ Why was the city so called? Because, during the building of it the confusion or diversity of tongues originated. From henceforth men were scattered abroad over the face of the earth, and founded different nationalities.

The children of Sem remained in Asia, and from them descended the Israelites, the chosen people of God. Most of the descendants of Cham settled in Africa, while those of Japhet took up their abode in Europe. Thus were different nations founded. The more men multiplied on the earth, the more wicked they became⁷. Instead of adoring the true God, they began to adore a multitude of false gods⁸. Some worshipped the sun, moon and stars, others worshipped men and beasts, and even the works of their own hands. To these false divinities even human victims were offered, and sometimes innocent children who were made to endure the most cruel torments. Such is the consequence of abandoning the worship of the true God!⁹

⁷ Sinfulness increased so that the number of the wicked grew greater and greater, and the number of the good less. — ⁸ Because men gave themselves over to their bad passions and were further and further removed from God by their sins, they gave up believing in Him and worshipped creatures. This worship of false gods is called idolatry, and the people who so worship are called idolaters. — ⁹ Their sin grew and grew, because God gave them over to the desires of their heart. When Cain began to yield to the passions of envy and hatred, God did not give him over to these passions unwarned. When the children of Cain, the “sons of men”, turned away from the true God, He, in His goodness, urged them to penance and conversion through holy Henoch. And immediately before the Deluge, He made the just Noe stand forth and proclaim the punishment which was hanging over mankind. Each of these times God warned sinners and manifested Himself to them: but now when, after the building of the Tower of Babel, men fell away from Him, though He neither destroyed nor punished them, He no longer revealed Himself to them, but gave them over to the desires of their hearts. Because they forsook God, He forsook them; and they had to learn by experience to what they would come, when left by God to themselves.

II. Commentary.

Idolatry is a grievous sin against the first Commandment. It is, moreover, unreasonable and foolish, and is a sad proof of the evil effects on man of original sin.

Necessity of grace. God gave the idolaters over to their own evil desires and inclinations. As evil inclinations are rife in man, in consequence of original sin, it is only by God's grace that he is able to keep the commandments. As



God did not sustain by His grace these men who had rejected Him, they gave themselves over to the desires of their hearts, and were led by their unbridled passions into the most horrible sins.

Pride. This story shows us how man's apostasy from God began by pride. At the time that Noe's descendants built the Tower of Babel, they had increased to some millions in number. They began to build in defiance of God, relying on their own strength and numbers. They did not give glory to God, and would not acknowledge that they had received all things from Him, and could do nothing without Him. Against His will, they intended to build a tower which would reach to heaven, and would make their name famous in all ages. Thus it was pride which prompted this sinful undertaking.

God's Blessing the one thing necessary. This story of the Tower of Babel shows us the truth of the Psalmist's words: "Unless the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it" (Ps. 126, 1).

Necessity of supernatural revelation. The majority of men fell into idolatry about 2000 years after the creation. However, there were always a few just men who, with their families, preserved the faith in the true God, and His revelation; such, for instance, were Abraham, Melchisedech, Job &c. But the true faith would have been lost even in those families, unless God had revealed Himself anew, as you will learn He did, in the stories which follow. Divine revelation was necessary, or else even man's natural knowledge of God would have been lost.

The punishment of dispersion was at the same time a benefit to mankind. If all men had remained together much longer, they would have destroyed each other by civil war and fighting among themselves. (See the strife between the shepherds of Abraham and Lot. Old Test. X.)

The causes of unbelief. How came it that reasonable men could sink so low as to give themselves over to the follies of idolatry? Did God, then, not make Himself known to them? Now, the religion which is taught us by the visible creation and the voice of conscience, is called natural religion. That which we have learnt from the patriarchs, prophets &c. &c., is called revealed religion. The men of the time of the Tower of Babel possessed a revealed religion, for Noe had faithfully delivered to his descendants the revelation of God, handed down by Adam. But as men followed their evil inclinations more and more, their faith became weak. They believed, indeed, but their faith was not living: they lived as if there were no God, until at last they lost the supernatural gift of faith. But, you will say, they could still know God by the light of their natural reason; "for the invisible things of Him, from the creation of the world, are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made: His eternal power also and divinity, so that they (i. e. the heathen) are inexcusable" (Rom. 1, 20). But they lost even the natural knowledge of God, because their hearts and wills were so corrupt that they were no longer capable of knowing Him. They spoke thus, as it were, to God: "Depart from us: we desire not the knowledge of Thy ways" (Job 21, 14). Once they turned their hearts from God, their reason became more and more blinded by their evil passions, and they fell into the utmost spiritual ignorance, and into the most foolish idolatry. Pride and vice still lead many men to unbelief.

The re-union of mankind in the Church. People of all tongues are gathered together in unity of faith in the Catholic Church; for all Catholics over the whole face of the earth are joined together in one faith, one hope, one love. This unity of spirit is expressed by

the unity of the language (Latin), used by the Church. In the Catholic Church, therefore, which is governed by the Holy Ghost, the very opposite has taken place to that which took place in the City of Confusion. There, the speech of men was confounded, and they were scattered: in the Church, men of every land and every tongue are gathered together in unity of faith and speech, by the Holy Ghost Whom Jesus Christ sent on Whitsunday. On that day there were collected together many men of different countries, and yet they all understood the speech of the apostles, and 3000 of them became Christians. On that day was built a city which rests upon earth and reaches to heaven; in which men speak one tongue, and have one faith, and with which God is well pleased. That city is the Holy Catholic Church.

III. Application.

There are still on this earth 800,000,000 heathen who do not know God and His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ. Pray earnestly for the conversion of the heathen.

Your forefathers, too, were heathens, and were converted by missionaries, sent by the Holy See. Thank God for your holy faith, and confess it by word and deed. Pray fervently to the Holy Ghost to keep you and yours firm in the light of the faith.

SECOND EPOCH.

THE TIME OF THE PATRIARCHS

(about 2100—1500 B. C.).

CHAPTER IX.

CALL OF ABRAM.

Hitherto we have been engaged in a brief study of the primitive history of man. In the last chapter we were told that the larger portion of mankind fell away from God into the grossest idolatry. Of those heathen nations whom God "gave up to the desires of their heart", we hear no more in Sacred History, with the exception of chance accounts of those with whom the people of Israel came in contact. Henceforth Scripture relates only the history of the people of Israel to whom God revealed Himself again and again. This history is divided into six sections: 1. The time of the patriarchs, 2. the age of Moses, 3. Josue and the judges, 4. the kings, 5. the Babylonian captivity, 6. the time after the Babylonian captivity.

The first section, therefore, treats of the patriarchs, or first parents of the children of Israel, and covers a period of 600 years, namely from 2100 to 1500 B. C. It begins by the narrative of the call of Abram which contains the account of how God chose him out to be the father of the whole Israelite people (and of the Divine Redeemer).

I. Narrative and Explanation.

AMONGST the wicked there was one just and upright man. He was called Abram¹. The Lord chose him that, through him and his posterity, the true faith² and hope in the promised Redeemer might be preserved and propagated on the earth. He said to him: "Go forth out of thy country and from thy kindred, and out of thy father's house³, and come into the land which I will show thee, and I will make of thee a great nation⁴. I will bless thee, and magnify thy name, and thou shalt be blessed; and in thee shall all the nations of the world be blessed"⁵.

¹ He, living in the midst of idolaters, had remained faithful to God. It was on account of his faithfulness that God favoured him, by revealing Himself to him, and by choosing him to be the father of the faithful. — ² i. e. the faith in the true God which had been handed down ever since the days of Adam. — ³ God commanded Abram to do this, because idolatry prevailed in his own country, and even among his own kindred. He wished moreover to test Abram's obedience and trust in Him. — ⁴ Thy descendants shall be a great nation. — ⁵ From Abram was to descend the Redeemer Who would bring grace and blessing to all mankind.

The father of Abram had gone to settle in Chaldea, and had taken up his abode in Haran⁶, with his relatives; but as idolatry had at last made its way even into that family, the Lord called Abram forth from amongst his kindred. Abram believed the word of the Lord, and instantly set out for Chanaan, taking with him Sarai, his wife, and Lot, his nephew⁷, and his servants and his herds of cattle. After a long journey, he arrived in the land of Chanaan, and came to Sichem⁸. He was, then, seventy-five years old. Chanaan, on account of its beauty and fertility, was called a land flowing with milk and honey. There the Lord appeared again to Abram and said to him: "To thy seed will I give this land." Abram, wishing to show his gratitude, raised in that place an altar to the Lord. Henceforth⁹ Chanaan was also called the Promised Land¹⁰. Gratitude to God for past favours is the most certain means of obtaining new ones.

⁶ On the upper Euphrates. — ⁷ i. e. his brother's son. Lot's father was dead. — ⁸ See on the map. — ⁹ i. e. from the time God promised it to Abram's descendants. — ¹⁰ We Christians call it the Holy Land, because it was there that our Lord lived, laboured and suffered. In geography it is called Palestine. This important country is situated at the east end of the Mediterranean Sea, and occupies a very small space in the eastern hemisphere. It is only about 140 miles long from north to south, and 40 miles broad, and is about as large as Wales. It is bounded on the north by the mountains of Lebanon; on the south by the deserts of Arabia; on the west by the Mediterranean; and on the east by the Syrian deserts. God, in His wisdom, appointed this land to be the abode of His chosen people, because it was so well suited to their peculiar vocation. The land of Chanaan is pretty well shut in on all sides by mountains, sea and deserts, and this seclusion made it more easy for the people of God to keep themselves aloof from heathen nations, and preserve intact the true faith. On

the other hand Chanaan was situated in the centre of the then known world, so that it was easy to spread among all nations, first, the promise of the Redeemer, and later on, the preaching of the Gospel.

II. Commentary.

The second promise of the Messiah. The words: "In thee shall all the kindred of the world be blessed", contain the second promise of the Messiah. The second promise is more explicit than the first, for it says that the Divine Redeemer shall be born of the seed of Abram.

Necessity of faith. It is not for nothing that we are told so explicitly that Abram believed God, for faith is the first and most necessary of virtues. Faith brought Abram into the Promised Land; and it is only through faith that we can attain to the promised land of heaven.

Grounds of faith. Abram believed in God, because God is the very truth.

The characteristics of faith. The faith of Abram had all the characteristics of true faith, being entire, firm, steadfast and living. His faith was *entire*, because he believed all that God told him. It was *firm*, because he doubted nothing, but believed unreservedly in the words of the Lord. It would have been quite natural for him to ask, how it was possible for a great nation to spring from him who yet had no child; but he gave ear to no such thought, and simply held firm by the word of God. His faith was *steadfast*, because he did not allow it to be shaken either by the ridicule and arguments of his unbelieving relations, or by the difficulties and dangers of the journey before him. Finally, his faith was *living*, because he acted up to it, and did all that God required of him.

Obedience to God. Abram's cheerful obedience to God was a fruit of his living faith. God's command to leave his home was not an easy one to obey, for the natural love of home and kindred is a very strong one. Moreover, God did not tell him where He was going to lead him. He was commanded to go into an unknown country, among strange people, and was entirely ignorant as to his future fate. Nevertheless, he obeyed God's command promptly and

cheerfully. "By faith Abram obeyed to go out into a place which he was to receive for an inheritance, and he went out not knowing whither he went" (Hebr. 11, 8). He has given us a grand example of obedience which we ought to strive to follow. "He that believeth God, taketh heed to the commandments" (Ecclus. 32, 28).

III. Application.

God has not asked of you anything so hard as He asked of Abram; and yet how often you disobey Him! Whenever you tell lies, or fly into a passion, or neglect your prayers, or do not do as your parents tell you, you are disobeying God. Be sorry for your disobedience, and when you say your morning-prayers, make a resolution to obey promptly and cheerfully those who are set over you.

Having a firm faith, Abram trusted himself cheerfully to the guidance of divine providence. A childlike confidence in the providence of our Heavenly Father is a great support and comfort to us in all the circumstances of our lives. Unhappy he who has not got this confidence! We do not know what will happen to us in the future; but we do know that our Father in heaven cares for us, and that not a sparrow can fall to the ground without His knowledge and consent. So never mind what happens to you, say: "Whatever God does, is well done, even though I cannot understand it." Say constantly: "God's will be done! Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."

CHAPTER X.

ABRAM'S LOVE OF PEACE.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

GOD blessed Abram and increased his herds¹ and those of Lot in such a manner that the pasture in that country was not sufficient for them. On this account a strife arose between the herdsmen of Abram and those of Lot. And Abram said to Lot: "Let there be no quarrel², I beseech thee, between me and thee, and between my herdsmen and thy herdsmen; for we are brethren³. Behold, the whole land

is before thee⁴: depart from me, I beseech thee. If thou wilt go to the left hand, I will take the right; if thou choose the right hand, I will pass to the left.” Lot chose the fertile country about the Jordan⁵, and dwelt in Sodom. Abram dwelt in Hebron, and built there an altar to the Lord.

¹ He had become very rich. A little further on it is mentioned that he had three hundred and eighteen men servants whom he employed as soldiers. He had camels, asses, sheep and oxen. If you look at the pictures (pp. 17 and 38 of the Bible History), you will see how camels are used as beasts of burden in the East. There, a good camel costs a great deal of money. The ass is also a valuable beast in those parts, being much larger and stronger than our asses. They do the work of horses, yield very good milk, and their flesh is eatable. — ² or fighting. — ³ Lot was Abram's brother's son, not his brother; but among the Israelites all near relations were called brothers and sisters. Thus, in the New Testament, the relatives of our Lord were called His brethren, though He had no brother. — ⁴ i. e. you may go into any part of the country you choose. Thus Abram left the choice to Lot. — ⁵ The Jordan is the principal river of the Promised Land. It takes its rise in Mount Lebanon, flows through Chanaan from north to south, and runs into the Dead Sea (see map 2). The country about the Jordan which Lot chose, was not the valley north of the Dead Sea, but what is now the southern part of the Dead Sea itself, south of the peninsula. This part was not sea then, but a beautiful valley, watered by springs, and in which lay the towns of Sodom and Gomorrha. It is only since the destruction of those cities that the beautiful plain has become a part of the Dead Sea.

Some time after this, strange kings, having come into the land, began to rob and plunder the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha, took Lot captive, and seized all his substance⁶. As soon as Abram heard⁷ that Lot had been taken captive, he, with three hundred and eighteen well-armed men, his servants, pursued the kings, overtook them, rescued Lot from their hands, and brought him back with all his possessions. As Abram returned victorious, Melchisedech, king of Salem⁸, and the king of Sodom went out to meet him. Melchisedech, being a priest of the Most High, offered to the Lord a sacrifice of bread and wine, as a sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving for Abram and his servants. He blessed him and said: “Blessed be Abram by the Most High God, by Whose protection the enemies are in thy hands”⁹. Abram gave him the tithes¹⁰



of the booty. The king of Sodom then said to Abram: "Give me the persons, and the rest take to thyself." But Abram would accept of no reward¹¹. Melchisedech was a figure of the Eternal High Priest, Jesus Christ. His sacrifice was a figure of the Sacrifice of the Mass.

⁶ i. e. all that he possessed. — ⁷ from one of Lot's people, who had fled from Sodom to Abram at Hebron. Abram immediately collected together those of his servants who were strong, and able to fight, pursued the kings who had retreated towards the north, surprised them in the night, defeated them, and set free Lot and the other prisoners. — ⁸ This was later called Jerusalem. Melchisedech believed in the true God, and was at the same time king and priest. As priest, he blessed Abram, and returned thanks to God for his victory over an enemy, who was so much stronger than himself. His sacrifice was, therefore, a thank-offering. — ⁹ i. e. in the power. — ¹⁰ i. e. the tenth part of everything that he had taken from the enemy. He gave him this, because he was a priest. — ¹¹ Abram would not keep anything for himself, but he asked that the men, who had fought with him and risked their lives, should have their due share of the booty.

II. Commentary.

Peacemaking. Abram was a lover of peace. He was older than Lot and, moreover, the head of the family; yet

he withdrew in his favour, and gave him the choice of the best pasturage, rather than that there should be any further strife. We ought to love peace in the same way, and prevent quarrelling and fighting, as far as we can. We ought to give up an advantage, and suffer some loss, rather than begin a quarrel; for we are all brethren in Jesus Christ. "Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called the children of God."

Abram's disinterestedness was shown by his conduct on two occasions; first, towards Lot, and next, towards the king of Sodom. When Abram found it necessary to separate from Lot, he did not consult his own interests by keeping the best part of the country for himself; though it was to him and not to Lot that God had promised the whole land; but he gave Lot his free choice of the best pasturage. Then, when the king of Sodom offered him all his booty as a reward, he refused to keep anything for himself. He had undertaken the dangerous war out of pure love, without any thought of his own profit or advantage. His love was, therefore, quite disinterested. This noble disposition of Abram puts to shame those Christians who are always seeking their own advantage, and who will not even show a kindness to any one, without hope of reward. But did Abram, then, receive no reward? Yes, he received the reward of a good conscience. The consciousness that he had done a good work, and had deserved a reward of God, filled his heart with very great joy. We, too, ought to value the approbation of our own consciences and of Almighty God, far more than the praise and rewards of this world.

Real love of our neighbour. When Abram learnt the misfortune which had overtaken his nephew, he settled at once to go to his help. He remembered no more Lot's selfish and ungrateful conduct, but only remembered his present necessity and misfortune. He sincerely loved Lot, and wished to help him, even at the expense of great danger; for, after all, these powerful kings might easily have defeated him, and killed or taken him prisoner.

Inordinate self-love. Lot did not behave well to Abram. Firstly, he ought never to have accepted Abram's generous offer, and ought rather to have given the preference to his uncle. His love of himself was inordinate, and, therefore, he became selfish. Lot believed he had chosen the best portion, and yet his very choice soon brought misfortune to him. Secondly, he ought not to have gone so far away from his beloved uncle and protector. Thirdly, he ought, anyhow, not to have gone to live in Sodom, full as it was of impious and vicious men. There was great danger there both to himself and his family, who might be led away by the bad example round them. We ought not to throw ourselves into the company of the wicked, and we ought to avoid all occasions of sin. We ought to care more for our souls, and their eternal interests, than for our bodies, and their temporal interests. Lot, therefore, did wrong in going to Sodom, and putting his soul into danger, for the sake of mere temporal advantages. And God punished him for this by letting the strange kings rob him and take him prisoner.

Melchisedech, the fourth type of Jesus Christ. Melchisedech's name signifies the king of justice, and he was king of Salem, which name means peace: Jesus Christ is in a far higher sense King of justice, and the Prince of peace who bought for us everlasting peace. Melchisedech was not only a king, but also a priest: Jesus Christ is our sovereign king and priest. Melchisedech offered bread and wine to God as an unbloody sacrifice: Jesus Christ offered Himself to His Eternal Father at the Last Supper, under the form of bread and wine, and continues to do so in the holy mass. Melchisedech, after the sacrifice, blessed Abram and his servants: Jesus Christ, by the hand of His priest, blesses the faithful at the end of mass. This will make you understand the meaning of what God Almighty says to the Divine Redeemer by the mouth of the prophet David: "Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedech" (Ps. 109, 4. Compare New Test. LXV).

You have now learnt *four types of our Lord*, namely, Adam, Abel, Noe and Melchisedech. These types show that our Divine Redeemer is, firstly, our Head: secondly, the Just One who suffered and was slain; thirdly, our Saviour from the destruction of sin and hell; and fourthly, an eternal King and Priest who, like Melchisedech, offers an unbloody sacrifice.

III. Application.

Do you love peace as Abram did? What is the principal reason why you quarrel with other children? Try to be more unselfish. "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity" (Ps. 132, 1). If you have hitherto been quarrelsome, make it up with your comrades as soon as possible.

Abram gave tithes of his spoils to Melchisedech, because he was a priest. Reverence the priesthood. Priests are the messengers of God.

CHAPTER XI.

ABRAHAM'S FAITH AND HOSPITALITY — CIRCUMCISION.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

AFTER these things the word of the Lord came to Abram in a vision, saying: "Fear not¹, I am thy protector², and thy reward exceeding great"³. On a certain night, Abram was called by a voice from heaven which said: "Look up to the heaven and number the stars, if thou canst. So shall thy seed be"⁴. Abram believed, and his faith⁵, together with his good works, justified him before God. The Lord again appeared to him, when he was ninety-nine years of age, and said to him: "I am the Almighty God. Walk before Me⁶ and be perfect⁷. Neither shall thy name be called any more Abram, a high father, but Abraham, father of a multitude, because I have made thee a father of many nations. I will establish my covenant between thee and Me. All the male kind of you shall be circumcised⁸. Sarai, thy wife, shall be called Sara, and she shall bear thee a son whose name thou shalt call Isaac."

¹ Abram feared that the kings whom he had defeated would revenge themselves on him. — ² I will take care of thee. — ³ I will give Myself to thee by the eternal vision, as a reward. God promised Himself to be Abram's reward, because he had refused to take any earthly one for what he had done. The possession and contemplation of God is the highest of all rewards. — ⁴ i. e. as numerous the stars. — ⁵ His having believed unconditionally in God. — ⁶ Have Me always

before thine eyes, and remember that I am always with thee. — ⁷ i. e. do only that which is right in my sight: lead a holy life in My presence. — ⁸ shall be cut in the skin in a particular way.

As Abraham was one day, about noon, sitting at the door of his tent, he saw three men approaching. He ran to meet them ⁹, bowed down before them, and invited them to rest in his tent and partake of some refreshment ¹⁰. Calling Sara, his wife, he told her to make some cakes of the finest flour. He caused the best calf of his herds to be killed for the entertainment of the unknown visitors. Butter, milk and honey were also placed before them, Abraham himself waiting upon his guests. After the meal, when they were about to depart, one of the strangers said to Abraham that after a year he would return, and that Sara, his wife, would have a son. Then, Abraham understood that the Lord God Himself ¹¹, accompanied by angels, was his guest. Kindness and courtesy to strangers should be praised and encouraged, since God rewarded so richly the hospitality of Abraham. Circumcision was a figure of the sacrament of Baptism.

⁹ He begged the strangers, as a favour to himself, to come and be entertained by him. — ¹⁰ He also brought water for them to wash their feet. In the East, in those days, people did not wear shoes or boots as we do, but only soles or sandals, bound to their feet by straps (see pictures in Bible History pp. 20, 51. 64). The feet, being bare, became covered with dust, and had to be washed very often. To wash the feet of another was a service of love. — ¹¹ He knew this, because the stranger revealed things to him which only God could have known.

II. Commentary.

Faith. At the time that Almighty God told Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the heavens, he and his wife, Sara, had no children, and both of them were growing very old. Now, as a rule, old people have not children born to them, so it seemed very unlikely that Abraham and Sara should have a son. Nevertheless, Abraham believed firmly in God's promise that He would give him a son, that his descendants would become a great nation, and that of his family would be born the Redeemer. On account of his faith in God's word, and especially in the promise of

the future Saviour, Abraham was justified, i. e. he received sanctifying grace. Without faith no man can be justified, for "without faith it is impossible to please God" (Hebr. 11, 6). "The just man liveth by faith" (Rom. 1, 17).

Hope. With firm confidence Abraham waited for every thing that God had promised him, and gave himself over calmly to His guidance. "By faith he abode in the (strange) land", says St. Paul, "dwelling in tents, for he looked for a city that hath foundations (i. e. the heavenly Jerusalem), whose builder and maker is God" (Hebr. 11, 9. 10). He, therefore, regarded himself as a stranger and pilgrim, and looked forward to his heavenly home, and the eternal possession and vision of God.

Charity. Abraham's faith was living, and active through love. He loved God above all things, as he proved in the story you will hear in chapt. XIII. In the last chapter we saw how he loved his neighbour, and he again proved this by his behaviour to the three strangers. Abraham, the rich shepherd-prince, to whom Almighty God had made such great promises, ran to meet the three strangers, bowed down before them, and begged them to stay with him. He washed their feet and served them, while they were eating, though he had servants in abundance. Did not this show a great love of his neighbour, and great humility? As a reward of his virtue, God promised him that in a year he should have a son.

Walking in the Presence of God. Thinking constantly of God's presence is a powerful motive for the practice of what is good, and the avoidance of what is evil. Wherever we are, there is God with us, seeing every thing that we think and do! We ought, therefore, to live with Him, to meditate on His universal presence, and lift up our hearts to Him. By doing this we shall avoid sin and grow in virtue.

The Old Covenant. Almighty God made His covenant first with Abraham, as being the father of His chosen people. Later (on Mount Sinai) He confirmed and renewed it with all the people of Israel. He instituted the rite of circumcision as an outward and visible sign of this covenant, that it might be, as it were, cut into the flesh of His chosen people,

so that it could not be forgotten. This sign was to speak to the soul of every man of Israel, saying: "You are a member of the chosen people. You belong to God, and are to serve Him only!"

Circumcision a type of holy Baptism. By circumcision man belonged to the Old Covenant: by Baptism he belongs to the New. By the first he pledged himself to observe the Old Law: in Baptism we pledge ourselves faithfully to observe the Christian Law. Circumcision impressed an indelible mark on the body; Baptism does the same to the soul. The difference lies in this, that circumcision could not like Baptism cleanse man from sin, and make him pure and holy.

Heaven. God gives Himself to the blessed as their reward exceeding great. They gaze for ever on His infinite majesty, and are eternally united to Him in love and happiness. Oh, what joy to possess God Himself, Who is infinite goodness, beauty and holiness. Could God give us more than Himself!

III. Application.

Almighty God is near each one of us, and yet how little we think about Him! Do not ever again be so forgetful of God, but put yourself in His presence several times each day. Whenever any body whose opinion you respect is looking at you, you gather yourself together, and are careful to do nothing wrong! Should you not have much more respect for God's presence?

You were put into this world to love and serve God. How have you served Him hitherto? Could you not serve Him better? Renew your baptismal vows to be faithful to Him unto death!

CHAPTER XII.

DESTRUCTION OF SODOM AND GOMORRHA.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

A BRAHAM went part of the way¹ with the strangers, who were going to Sodom. As they journeyed along together, the Lord² said to Abraham: "The cry of Sodom and Gomorrha is multiplied, and their sin is become exceedingly grievous."³ He told him that He would destroy the two

cities. Abraham was struck with fear; for, although the men amongst whom he lived, were wicked, he loved them as neighbours. At last, drawing near to the Lord, he said: "Wilt Thou destroy the just with the wicked? If there be fifty just men in the city, shall they perish withal? and wilt Thou not spare that place for the sake of the fifty just, if they be therein?" The Lord replied: "If I find in Sodom fifty just men within the city, I will spare the whole place for their sake." And Abraham said: "Seeing I have once begun, I will speak again to my Lord, whereas I am but dust and ashes⁴. If there be five less than fifty just persons in the city, wilt Thou destroy it?" And the Lord said to Abraham: "I will not destroy it, if I find five and forty." Abraham continued to plead in this manner, till at last the Lord said to him: "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten." Then the Lord disappeared, and Abraham returned to his tent.

¹ Abraham not only waited on the three strangers, but, full of respect, accompanied them on their way. — ² God, Who, in the form of a stranger, had appeared to Abraham. — ³ Their sins were many; but those of unchastity and impurity chiefly reigned in the two wicked cities. — ⁴ though I, a sinful, mortal man, am not worthy to speak to the Lord my God.

The ten just men were not found in Sodom, and the two angels were sent to destroy it. They reached Sodom in the evening, and found Lot sitting at the gate of the city. Lot invited them into his house, and the angels said to him: "Arise, get you out of this place, for the Lord will destroy it." Lot went that night to two young men who were to marry his daughters, and told them to arise and go forth, for the Lord would destroy the city. But they thought that he spoke in jest. At the first dawn of day the angels pressed⁵ Lot to depart, saying: "Take thy wife and thy two daughters, lest you also perish in the wicked city." And, as Lot still lingered⁶, they took him by the hand, and, as it were against his will, led him and his family out of the city, warning them all not to look back, under pain of death. Lot's wife, however, looked back, and was instantly changed into a pillar of salt. The sun had just risen, when Lot entered the



neighbouring city of Segor. Then, the Lord rained down from heaven fire and brimstone, and utterly destroyed those two wicked cities, with all their inhabitants ⁷.

⁵ They urged him. — ⁶ hesitating, and unable to make up his mind. — ⁷ Picture to yourselves this terrible judgment which overtook the wicked cities. As the sun rose in the east, and the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrrha woke from sleep, thick clouds gathered over them out of which fire fell which kindled every part of the town. The whole air was full of smoke and sulphur; the flames roared and licked up everything. The people, full of fear, rushed from their houses, hoping to escape from the city, but it was impossible to get out. The very air was aglow, and the earth itself, full of pitch and petroleum, was on fire. Their clothes caught fire, and they died a terrible death, shrieking in agony. The whole country round was burnt up, and remains unfruitful to the present day. The earth sank, and the waters of the Dead Sea rushed in, and covered the place where the wicked cities once stood, and formed what has since then been the southern part of the Dead Sea. Lot's wife who, against the angel's express command, looked back, was suffocated and seized by the fire, covered with the molten bitumen, so that her corpse stood up as a pillar of salt.

The *Dead Sea*, the southern portion of which (south of the peninsula) covers the ancient sites of Sodom and Gomorrrha, is a peculiar and

most ghastly lake. It lies very low, 900 feet below the level of the Mediterranean, and its water is so thick and bitter that no fish or creeping thing can live in it. If the Jordan, which flows into it, carries to it any fish, they die at once and come up to the surface. Therefore, the lake is called the Dead Sea. Objects thrown into it are covered at once with a salt-crust, and the stones on its shores are covered with bitumen. On the surface of the water, and on the shores, great flakes of bitumen are often found. The northern part of the lake is 1300 feet deep, but the southern part, where the wicked cities once stood, is only thirteen feet deep. This Dead Sea which covers the once beautiful site of Sodom and Gomorrha, is a terrible monument of divine justice.

II. Commentary.

God's Holiness and Justice are most plainly shown to us by the terrible fate of the wicked cities. The attack, made on them by the strange kings, was a visitation, permitted by God for the conversion of their wicked inhabitants. But they remained impenitent, and were quite as wicked after, as they were before, that visitation. Lot's good example might also have been to them a means of conversion, but they paid no heed to it. Then, Almighty God could no longer endure their shameful state of vice, for sin is infinitely abhorrent to the Most Holy God. He utterly destroyed the wicked cities from off the face of the earth, and made the whole neighbourhood desolate so that all men might know and fear His terrible justice. "Reducing the cities of the Sodomites and Gomorrhites to ashes, God condemned them to be overthrown", says Saint Peter, "making them an example to those that should after act wickedly" (2 Pet. 2, 6). The punishment of Sodom and Gomorrha is, therefore, always held up as an example of the divine justice.

God's hatred of impurity. This sin having been the chief cause of the destruction of the cities, you can see how hateful it is in the eyes of God, and how severely He punishes it. Impurity is the most shameful of all sins, and an abomination before God. It leads to many other sins, and easily results in impenitence and impiety, as was the case with the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrha. Almighty God does not always punish it in this world, but He will certainly do so

in the next world. "Do not err; neither fornicators nor adulterers shall possess the kingdom of God" (1 Cor. 6, 9).

The duty of intercessory prayer. Intercession for the living and the dead is a spiritual work of mercy. Love prompted Abraham to pray for the wicked Sodomites: love should prompt you to pray for others, for your parents, brothers and sisters, and for your spiritual and temporal superiors; but especially for sinners that they may have the grace of conversion, and may not be eternally lost. "Pray for one another that you may be saved" (James 5, 16).

The characteristics of prayer. Abraham prayed with fervour, with humility, with confidence, and with perseverance, making his petition six times.

The power of prayer. Abraham's prayer was not made in vain, for Almighty God granted it, in so far that, had there been ten just men in Sodom, the whole city would have been spared. "The continual prayer of a just man availeth much." (James 5, 16). A

Lot's steadfastness is worthy of our admiration. He lived for twenty years in the wicked city, and did not let himself be led away into sin, but remained firm in what was right, and brought up his children in the holy fear of God. Therefore, Holy Scripture, in allusion to him, says: "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly from temptation" (2 Pet. 2, 9); because they pray and cooperate with grace.

Sorrow on account of sin. Lot's fellow-citizens in Sodom "vexed his just soul with unjust works" (2 Pet. 2, 8). The sins and crimes which he was obliged to witness hurt his holy soul, because God was offended by them, and many souls were eternally lost. We, far from jesting about the sins of others, should mourn over them. We shall know by our conduct in such cases, whether or no we have a true love for God and our neighbour. "Blessed are they who mourn."

Guardian angels. Holy angels protected Lot and his family. Lot's wife did not take heed to their warning; therefore, she perished.

The torments of hell. The burning of the wicked cities gives us a faint idea of that hell into which the impenitent Sodomites were cast

for ever. The torments of the burning inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrhah were very terrible; but the torments of the lost souls in hell are far more terrible. The fire of Sodom was kindled in heaven; the fire of hell is kindled by the anger of God. The shrieks of the burning Sodomites were very terrible, but the wailing and gnashing of teeth of the damned are far worse. The bodies of the Sodomites were burnt and the fire was extinguished; but the damned burn and are never consumed, nor is the fire ever quenched.

Intercession. This story shows us how dear the just are in the sight of God. Because Abraham was just, Almighty God heard his prayer, and would have spared the cities for the sake of ten just people. Holy people living in any town or country bring a blessing on the sinners among whom they live, even though they may be scorned and persecuted by them. For their sake, many a temporal punishment is averted. Cloisters and religious houses bring a blessing on the places where they exist.

Inordinate love of temporal possessions. Lot's wife was punished by the death of her body, because, being too much attached to her possessions which she had been obliged to leave behind her in Sodom, she paid no heed to the angel's injunctions, but stopped and looked behind her. Was it not foolish of this woman to weigh the very best of earthly gifts, life, in the balance against her paltry household-goods? But those act with still greater madness who, from an inordinate love of honours, riches, pleasures &c., forget the salvation of their souls, and lose those possessions and joys which are eternal.

Temporal punishment. God rewarded the virtue of Lot by saving him from the destruction of Sodom. But he lost all his possessions which were destroyed with the city, and he was thus punished for his selfish conduct towards his uncle. By this punishment of Lot and his wife, we see that God punishes the venial sins and imperfections even of the just. Temporal punishment must be suffered either in this world or in purgatory.

The sin of Sodom. The Sodomites committed horrible and unnatural sins of impurity which called down the judgment of God. They are, therefore, counted among the sins which cry to heaven for vengeance.

III. Application.

How can you imitate Lot's steadfastness?

A just man is wounded by the sins of his fellow men. He laments their wickedness, and prays for their conversion. How have you behaved hitherto in this respect? How will you behave for the future? At the end of this lesson we will say three Our Fathers for the conversion of sinners.

Detest and fear sin, especially sins of impurity. Set hell before your eyes, think of its horrible torments, and carefully

avoid all temptations to such sins. Say thus: "What will the whole world profit me, if I follow my own inclinations, and suffer eternally in hell!"

CHAPTER XIII.

BIRTH OF ISAAC AND ABRAHAM'S SACRIFICE.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

SARA gave birth to a son, as the Lord had promised¹. He was named Isaac, and circumcised on the eighth day². Abraham loved this son very tenderly, and the Lord wished to see whether he loved his son more than God. When the boy had grown up³, the Lord said to Abraham⁴: "Take thy only-begotten son Isaac, whom thou lovest, and go into the land of vision, and there thou shalt offer him for a holocaust⁵ upon one of the mountains which I will show thee." Abraham instantly arose⁶, and by night saddled his ass, taking with him two young men, and Isaac, his son. And when he had cut the wood for the holocaust, he went to the place which God had shown him. On the third day he came in sight of Mount Moria, where he was to sacrifice his son; and he said to the servants: "Stay you here with the ass; I and the boy will go with speed as far as yonder, and, after we have worshipped⁷, will return to you." Then, he took the wood for the holocaust, and laid it upon the shoulders of Isaac. He himself carried in his hands fire⁸ and a sword. As they went along, Isaac said: "My father." And Abraham answered: "What wilt thou, son?" "Behold", said the son, "fire and wood: where is the victim for the holocaust?"⁹ Abraham replied: "God will provide Himself a victim for the holocaust, my son." So they went on together.

¹ Abraham was already a hundred years old, and his wife, Sara, ninety. Both rejoiced greatly at having a son. — ² For the reason why he was circumcised see Chapt. XI. — ³ He was perhaps about twenty or twenty-five years old. — ⁴ Almighty God wished to prove whether his faith were firm and living, and if he really loved Him above all things. — ⁵ In that kind of sacrifice the victim had to be first killed, and then burnt. — ⁶ Abraham obeyed immediately, although

the required sacrifice tore his heart. Since the destruction of Sodom he had lived at Bersabee which lay to the south of Hebron. From Bersabee to Mount Moria which was near Salem, was about twenty-five miles. It was on this mountain that, in after years, king Solomon built his splendid Temple. — ⁷ i. e. when they had offered their sacrifice in worship of God. — ⁸ i. e. red hot coals in a vessel. — ⁹ How the father's heart must have bled at these questions of his son! And what must Isaac have felt, when, at last, his father told him that he himself was to be the victim! He was so young; and now, he was to die by the hand of his own father! Nevertheless, he submitted to God's will, when he learnt that it was He who had commanded it.

When they reached the top of the mountain, Abraham erected an altar, placed the wood upon it, bound his son, and laid him on the altar. Then, he put forth his hand and took the sword to sacrifice his son. And behold! an angel from heaven cried out to him, saying: "Abraham, Abraham." And he answered: "Here I am." And the angel said: "Lay not thy hand on the boy, neither do thou anything to him! Now I know that thou fearest God, and hast not spared thy only-begotten son for My sake." Abraham lifted up his eyes and saw behind him a ram¹⁰, sticking fast by his horns in the bushes; him he took and offered, instead of his son. The angel of the Lord spoke again unto Abraham, saying: "By My own self have I sworn¹¹, saith the Lord, because thou hast done this thing¹², and hast not spared thy only-begotten son for My sake, I will bless thee, and will multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand that is by the sea-shore. And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed¹³, because thou hast obeyed My voice." And Abraham returned home with his son.

¹⁰ i. e. a male sheep. Abraham saw that it was by the will of God that the ram was on that spot; so he took it and sacrificed it, instead of his son. — ¹¹ God, being the Most High, can swear by nothing higher than Himself. — ¹² i. e. because thou hast obeyed the command of God, and wert willing to offer up thy son. — ¹³ As a reward for his obedience God now solemnly repeated the same promise which He had made, when He first called Abraham, that is, the promise of a numerous posterity, and that the Saviour should be born of his family.



II. Commentary.

Strength of faith. Abraham's faith was put to a most severe test. Almighty God had promised him a numerous posterity, and that in his seed all the nations of the earth should be blessed; and yet now He commands him to sacrifice that son through whom alone he could have any descendants! Was not this an apparent contradiction? Nevertheless, Abraham's faith in the word of the Lord was unshaken, and he doubted neither the goodness nor the faithfulness of God. He did not murmur and say: "How can the good God ask of me such a hard and unnatural sacrifice? How can His promises possibly be fulfilled, if my only son is slain?" No, on the contrary, he said to himself: "God is faithful and true: His promise will surely be fulfilled, though how, or in what way, I know not! God is almighty: He is able to raise up Isaac even from the dead" (Hebr. 11, 19). Abraham believed so firmly that he is called a man of faith, and the father of the faithful. His example ought to lead us to believe firmly in God's word, and trust in His goodness

and faithfulness, never mind what our temptations and trials may be.

The love of God above all things. Abraham had a living faith, that is, he lived up to his faith, and, consequently, loved God above all things. His love of God had to stand a very severe test. He dearly loved the son whom God had given him, and the command which Almighty God gave him to sacrifice this son, was given to prove whether he loved Him more than his son. Abraham, however, did not hesitate for an instant. He got up, at once, in the middle of the night, and made his preparations for the required sacrifice. He had interceded for the wicked cities, but he had no word to say for his son. He travelled alongside of the boy for three long days, and his heart must have sorely ached, as he looked at Isaac and said to himself: "Very soon you will no longer be among the living, for you will have died by the hand of your own father!" However, his resolution never failed. He lifted up his heart to God and said: "Thou, O God, didst give me this son. Thou hast bidden me sacrifice him to Thee. So be it! Thy holy will be done! For love of Thee I will sacrifice him, never mind how hard it be to me!" — Thus, during those three days' journey he offered up his son a thousand times on the altar of his heart, before he actually bound him and laid him as a victim upon the wood, and raised his hand to slay him. What great, what mighty love! Isaac was dearer to him than anything on earth, and on him he had set all his hopes; but he loved God more than he loved Isaac, and for love of Him he offered up his son. He proved that he loved God above all things.

The object of trials. Why did God try Abraham? Was this trial necessary to show Him Abraham's dispositions? Did He not know beforehand that Abraham's faith was firm, and that he was quite ready to sacrifice his son for love of Him? Yes; God knew all this, because He is omniscient, and for Him, therefore, the test was not necessary: He need never prove men in order to discover their faith, obedience &c. Almighty God did not prove Abraham for

His own sake but for Abraham's, in order to give him the opportunity of practising his virtues of faith, love &c., and of thus increasing his merits, and drawing down on himself fresh graces and blessings. This is why Almighty God so often tries us with all sorts of sufferings and adversities, these tests being of great benefit to ourselves.

The third promise of the Messias. The words: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed" contain a renewed promise of the Redeemer.

Isaac, the fifth type of Jesus Christ. (We have already studied the first four types: Adam, Abel, Noe and Melchisedech.) In what way was Isaac a type of our Blessed Lord? The birth of Isaac was promised repeatedly: so was the coming of Jesus Christ. Isaac was the only and dearly beloved son of his father: Jesus Christ is the only-begotten and beloved Son of God, in Whom His Father is well pleased (New Test. XII). Isaac was obedient to his father, and was willing, out of obedience, to give up his life, letting himself be bound, and waiting patiently for his death-stroke: Jesus Christ was obedient to His Heavenly Father, unto death, even unto the death of the Cross. "As a sheep He was led to the slaughter, and like a lamb without a voice before his shearer, so opened He not His mouth" (New Test. LXXXVII). Isaac himself carried up the mountain the wood on which he was to be slaughtered: Jesus Christ carried up Calvary the Cross on which He was to die. Isaac was saved from death by the wonderful intervention of an angel: Jesus Christ was brought back to life by the greatest of all miracles, His resurrection. You see in how many ways Isaac was a most plain type of our Redeemer, of His death and of His resurrection; but the sacrifice of Isaac is, all the same, not a perfect type of the Sacrifice of our Lord, for no figure can perfectly show forth the infinite love of God in giving His Son to die for us. On one main point Isaac's sacrifice was very different from the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ. Abraham was quite ready, out of love for God, to offer up his beloved son; but Almighty God would not permit the sacrifice to be completed, because sinful man could not be redeemed

by a human sacrifice; and, therefore, the angel of God cried out to him, just as he was going to slay his son: "Hold thy hand!" God spared the son of Abraham, but He did not spare His own Son, but gave Him over to a painful death for our sakes. When, on Calvary, the executioners raised their hammers to nail to the Cross the Hands and Feet of God made Man, no angel cried out: "Hold thy hand!" The Sacrifice was completed, and the Son of God died for us on the Cross in unutterable agony of Soul and Body. "God so loved the world as to give His only-begotten Son that, whosoever believeth in Him, may not perish, but may have life everlasting" (New Test. XV).

The Vicarious Sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The ram whose head was caught in the thorns, and which was sacrificed, instead of Isaac, is a type of Jesus Christ, Who was crowned with thorns, and offered Himself for us on the Cross.

III. Application.

Abraham obeyed without any questioning, when God demanded of him the hardest of sacrifices. God asks nothing very hard of you, and yet you are often disobedient, and transgress those commandments which, by the help of His grace, you might very easily keep. When you disobey your parents, you disobey God, for it is His will that you should obey your parents and superiors. Make a point, then, of offering up in sacrifice to God the faults to which you are most prone.

Abraham practised the three theological virtues of faith, hope and charity in a most perfect way. Try to kindle them in your own hearts. Let us conclude this lesson by making acts of these virtues.

CHAPTER XIV.

ISAAC MARRIES REBECCA.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

NOW, Abraham was advanced in years¹, and the Lord had blessed him in all things. He, however, wished, before his death, to see his son wedded to a virtuous wife.

But, as the daughters of the land were wicked², he said to his old servant Eliezer: "Go to my own country and kindred³, and take a wife thence for my son Isaac; but beware lest thou take one of the daughters of the Chanaanites, among whom I dwell." The servant promised faithfully all that Abraham had commanded him. He, then, took ten camels of his master's herd, loaded them with rich presents, and set out for Haran, where Nachor, the brother of Abraham, dwelt. Arriving there, he let his camels rest near a well, outside the city. It was in the evening, the time when the young women were wont to come out to draw water from the well. Then, he prayed fervently within himself that heaven might prosper his undertaking: "O Lord, I beseech Thee, show kindness to my master Abraham. Behold, I stand nigh the spring, and the daughters of the inhabitants of the city will come out to draw water. Now, therefore, the maid to whom I shall say: 'Let down thy pitcher that I may drink,' and she shall answer: 'Drink, and I will give thy camels drink also,' let it be the same whom Thou hast provided for Thy servant Isaac; and by this I shall understand that Thou hast shown kindness to my master."

¹ Abraham was, now, 140 years old, and Isaac 40. — ² The inhabitants of Chanaan did not believe in the true God, but worshipped idols. — ³ Before Abraham lived in Chanaan he had lived with his father in Haran of Mesopotamia. Haran was about 200 miles from Bersabee.

He had not yet ended his prayer when Rebecca, a beautiful and modest maiden, came out, carrying a pitcher. She went down to the spring⁴, filled the pitcher, and was returning, when Eliezer ran to meet her and said: "Give me a little water to drink out of thy pitcher." She answered him kindly: "Drink, my lord." And quickly she let down the pitcher upon her arm, and gave him drink. And when he had drunk, she said: "I will draw water for thy camels also till they all drink." Then, pouring water into the troughs, she let the camels drink⁵. After they had drunk, the servant presented her with golden ear-rings and bracelets⁶, saying to her: "Whose daughter art thou? Tell me, is there any place

in thy father's house to lodge?" She answered: "I am the daughter of Bathuel, the son of Nachor. We have a good store of both straw and hay, and a large place to lodge in." Then, Eliezer bowed down and adored the Lord, saying: "Blessed ⁷ be the Lord of my master Abraham, Who hath not taken away His mercy and truth from my master, and hath brought me the straight way into the house of my master's brother!"

⁴ This was not a running stream, but a well dug in the ground, to reach which a step had to be mounted. Above, near the step, was a drinking trough, made of wood or stone, into which water was poured for the cattle. — ⁵ This was hard work, for there were ten camels, each of which drank a great quantity of water. — ⁶ Broad rings or bands to wear on the wrists. — ⁷ Or praised be.

He was, then, invited to the house, and bread was set before him, but he refused to eat, until he had delivered his message. When he had stated the object of his coming, Laban, the brother of Rebecca, and Bathuel, her father, answered: "The word hath proceeded from the Lord⁸: we cannot speak any other thing but His pleasure. Behold! Rebecca is before thee: take her and go thy way, and let her be the wife of thy master's son, as the Lord hath spoken." Then, the servant bowed down to the ground, adored the Lord, and, bringing forth vessels of gold and silver, with garments of the finest texture, presented them to Rebecca. He, also, presented rich gifts to her brother and mother. Then, full of joy, he partook of the refreshments offered to him. Next morning, after Rebecca had received the blessing of her parents and brother, she set out with her maidens for her destined home, and, on arriving there, became the wife of Isaac. Abraham lived many years after Isaac's marriage. He died, aged one hundred and seventy-five years, and was buried by his son at Hebron⁹, where Sara, his wife, had been buried before.

⁸ God has so ordained it. — ⁹ Hebron was twenty-five miles to the south of Jerusalem (see map). Near this town was a double cave which Abraham had bought for a family burial place. This cave was the only possession which Abraham had in the Promised Land. Sara who had died three years before Isaac's marriage was buried there.

II. Commentary.

Unity of faith the chief thing in married life. Almighty God chose Abraham in order that through him and his descendants the true faith might be preserved and spread. Therefore, Abraham was very particular to choose for his son Isaac a wife who believed in and served the true God. He was resolved that Isaac should not marry any of the daughters of the heathen Chanaanites, however beautiful or rich they might be, for fear that either he or his children should become weak and wavering in their faith. His first care was that his son's wife should hold the true faith. It should likewise be the first thought of all Catholics, for unity and agreement in faith is, above all things, necessary to a happy marriage. Married people who look on religion as a secondary consideration are on the high road to indifference about their faith, and even to a denial of it altogether.

Eliezer the model of a faithful servant. Eliezer fulfilled his master's commission not only with prudence, but also with zeal, for he would not even eat, until he had delivered his message, and wished to return to his master as soon as possible after having done so. He, like Abraham, was remarkable for his piety and confidence in God. He prayed fervently for guidance in making a good choice, and thanked God for the gracious guidance vouchsafed to him.

The virtues displayed by Rebecca. She was kind and hospitable to Eliezer, and compassionate towards the thirsty camels. She voluntarily offered to draw water for the beasts, without waiting for Eliezer to ask her to do so. He knew by this action that she had a kind heart as well as that she was the bride destined by God for Isaac. God looks to the heart and not to the outward appearance, and chose Rebecca, on account of her virtues, to be the wife of the patriarch Isaac, and, therefore, one of those from whom the Divine Redeemer was descended.

A summary of Abraham's virtues. Faith and hope, love of God and his neighbour, hospitality, obedience, love of peace, disinterestedness and final perseverance.

Limbo. Where did Abraham's soul go after death? "He was gathered to his people" (Gen. 25, 8), i. e. he joined the souls of the just (such as Adam, Abel, Seth, Henoch, Noe &c.), in Limbo. There they enjoyed a perfectly happy repose, being consoled by the hope of Redemption and of being some day taken to heaven.

III. Application.

Begin and end each day, or any important undertaking, with a prayer for God's blessing. Begin with God and leave off with God; that is the best rule of life.

Are you obliging to your friends, and to strangers, as Rebecca was? Think in what way you can help others, whether brothers, comrades, friends, or strangers, and resolve to make use of your opportunities. God will reward each little service you perform.

CHAPTER XV.

ESAU AND JACOB.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

ISAAC¹ and Rebecca remained twenty years without children. At length God heard their prayer², and gave them two sons. The first-born³, Esau, was red and hairy, and of a rough, harsh temper. Jacob, the second, was smooth in appearance and gentle in his bearing. Esau became a skillful hunter and husbandman. Jacob was a plain man, and dwelt in tents. Isaac loved Esau, and ate with pleasure the game that he had killed. Rebecca, on the other hand, loved the mild and gentle Jacob. She loved him the more, because an angel had revealed to her in a vision that he, instead of Esau, had found favour with God⁴. One day Jacob was cooking a mess of pottage⁵, when Esau, coming home from the field, faint with hunger, said to his brother: "Give me of this pottage, for I am hungry." Jacob said to him: "Sell me thy first birthright." Esau replied: "Lo, I die of hunger⁶: what will the first birthright avail me?" Jacob answered: "Swear, therefore, to me." Esau swore⁷ and sold his birthright. And taking bread and the mess of pottage, he ate and drank and went away, making little account of having sold his birthright.

¹ Almighty God made to him the same promises as he had made to his father Abraham. — ² They had prayed for many years that they might have a son who would be heir of the promises. — ³ Or the eldest. — ⁴ i. e. that it was God's will that he should have precedency over Esau; that he was to be the heir of the promises, the forefather of the chosen people, and of the Divine Redeemer. — ⁵ A soup of lentils. — ⁶ This was evidently an exaggeration. He might have appeased his hunger with other food; but he had set his heart on this particular mess of lentils, and would have nothing else. — ⁷ He swore to give over to Jacob his birthright, or his right of being eldest. The first-born son received a double portion of his father's inheritance, and, after his father's death, he became the head and priest of the family. In the time of the patriarchs, it entailed not only these temporal advantages, but spiritual advantages also, for by his father's blessing the first-born was made the heir of the divine promises.* It was, therefore, most foolish and frivolous of Esau to sell these important rights for a mere mess of pottage!



Now, Isaac was old and had lost his eyesight⁸. One day he called Esau, his son, and said to him: "My son, thou seest I am old, and I know not the day of my death. Take thy arms, thy quiver⁹ and bow, and go abroad¹⁰; and when thou hast taken something by hunting, make me savoury meat

thereof, as thou knowest I like, and bring it that I may eat, and my soul may bless thee before I die." Esau promptly obeyed the command of his father, and went to the fields to hunt. Rebecca had overheard the words of Isaac, and fearing that, contrary to the will of God, Esau might

* In those old and venerable patriarchal days children esteemed their father's blessing very highly. It was to them the most valuable part of the paternal inheritance, and was like a sacrament, by means of which God conveyed to them the blessing which He had imparted to their forefathers, and made them the heirs of the promises (*Dupanloup*, "De l'Éducation").

be preferred to Jacob, she said to him: "Now, my son, follow my counsel. Go to the flock and bring me two of the best kids that I may make of them meat for thy father, such as he gladly eateth; so that, after having eaten it, he may bless thee before he die." Jacob hastened to the flock and brought two kids. Rebecca prepared them as though they were game, and, then, clothed Jacob in Esau's best garments, and covered his neck and hands with the skin¹¹ of the kids, and sent him to his father with the meats she had prepared. Isaac asked: "Who art thou, my son?" Jacob answered: "I am Esau, thy first-born; I have done as thou hast commanded; arise, sit, and eat of my venison that thy soul may bless me." Isaac said again: "Come hither that I may feel thee¹², my son, and may prove whether thou be my son Esau or no." Jacob, then, drew near to his father, and Isaac touching him, said: "The voice, indeed, is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau"¹³. And he gave him his blessing.

⁸ He was 137 years old and quite blind. — ⁹ A sheath in which arrows are placed, something like the sheath into which a soldier puts his sword. — ¹⁰ Out hunting. — ¹¹ The skins of Angora-goats, the hair of which is very soft. — ¹² That I may know by the touch. — ¹³ They are as hairy as the hands of Esau.

Scarcely had Jacob gone out, when Esau came with the game he had taken and cooked for his father. "Arise, my father, and eat," said he. Isaac, in surprise, asked him: "Who art thou?" and he answered: "I am thy first-born son Esau." And Isaac saw that Jacob had deceived him¹⁴. Then, Esau roared out with a great cry, saying: "He hath already taken from me my birthright¹⁵, and now, he hath robbed me of my father's blessing"¹⁶. Then, he said to his father: "Hast thou kept no blessing for me?" And as he continued to cry out and lament, Isaac, moved with compassion, said to him: "In the fat of the earth, and in the dew of heaven from above, shall thy blessing be. Thou shalt live by the sword, and shalt serve thy brother; but the time shall come when thou shalt shake off and loose his yoke from thy neck." From this time Esau hated his brother.

¹⁴ No doubt Isaac remembered what God had revealed to Rebecca about His choice of Jacob. — ¹⁵ Was that true? No, for he himself had sold it to Jacob. Now, in his anger, he laid all the blame on his brother. — ¹⁶ i. e. the blessing to which I, as the eldest son, have the right. But he no longer had a right to it, having sold his birthright, and sworn with an oath that he gave up all claim to it. He ought to have told his father this, when Isaac announced his intention of giving him his blessing.

II. Commentary.

Jacob's selfishness. Jacob did not behave either nicely or rightly, when he turned his brother's desire for the pottage to his own advantage, and asked such a high price for it. He behaved very selfishly, and not at all like his unselfish grandfather, Abraham.

Lies and dissimulation. Jacob sinfully deceived his father in a twofold way. To begin with, he told a direct lie; but he, also, lied to his father in another way, by dissimulating, putting on Esau's clothes which smelt of the field, and covering his hands with the hairy skins. It is quite possible to lie without speaking a word. When you dissimulate, and lie by your actions, you sin against the eighth Commandment quite as much as if you told a lie in so many words.

Sharing the guilt of another's sin. The fact that his mother induced him to deceive his father, was a partial excuse for Jacob. Jacob, indeed, carried out the deception, but Rebecca induced him to do so, so that she shared in his sin. But Jacob was not compelled to obey his mother, when she told him to act thus deceitfully!

The frivolity and greediness of Esau. The elder brother sinned by longing too greedily for the mess of pottage, and by selling, in order to gratify a desire of the moment, his birthright, to which were attached such great privileges. He ought not to have given up his right to be the heir of the promises, and the forefather of the Divine Redeemer, for any price which the world could have offered him. By giving way to a momentary and sensual desire, he proved how little he valued the good things of a higher kind which were held out to him. St. Paul, therefore, calls him, "a profane person" (Hebr. 12, 16). Esau should have overcome his

inordinate appetite. In order to attain to the virtue of temperance we must carefully deny ourselves.

Sinful oaths. Esau also sinned by lightly taking an oath which was not necessary.

Anger is a capital sin. Even as Esau was outwardly rough and hairy, so also was his character harsh and ungovernable. He conceived a great anger towards his brother; his anger turned to hatred; and hatred induced him to form the wicked project of killing his brother. In his blind passion he quite forgot how the murderer Cain had been punished, and gave no thought to the grief which his hatred was causing his parents (compare Commentary on the envy of Cain. Chapt. V).

Fulfilment of the blessing. Isaac said to Jacob: "Thy mother's children shall bow down before thee." This came to pass, for the descendants of Jacob, or the Israelites, overcame all other nations. But this promise has found its most complete fulfilment in our Divine Saviour, Who, by His human nature, was descended from Jacob. All Christian nations bow down to Him, their supreme Lord.

The folly of sinners. Many men, alas, imitate foolish, frivolous Esau, who sold such great treasures for a mere mess of pottage. Every Christian who commits a mortal sin, acts more foolishly than Esau, for he barter away treasures which are priceless and eternal, for a passing, sinful desire. He renounces the grace of God, inward peace and joy, and all his merits; and draws down on himself the curse of God and eternal damnation. Therefore, St. Paul says: "Look diligently, lest any man be wanting in the grace of God, lest there be any profane person like Esau who for one mess sold his birthright" (Hebr. 12, 15 &c.). Esau wept loudly for the loss of his father's blessing; "but how will the children of this world mourn and wail on the great Day of Judgment? Stupefied by their passions they bartered away their claim to heaven and all the imperishable treasures of the children of God, for the passing pleasures of sin; and on that day they will find themselves, in very deed, shut out from heaven and condemned to everlasting torments."*

* *Erdmann, Erklärung d. Bibl. Gesch. I. (Münster 1875), 102.*

The end does not justify the means. Rebecca and Jacob's intention in deceiving Isaac was good. They knew that Almighty God had chosen Jacob to be the heir of the promises, and they feared that His will would not be accomplished, if Esau succeeded in obtaining the blessing of the first-born. True; but ought they to have committed a sin to attain this end? No! sin remains sin, even if you have the best of intentions in committing it, and the noblest of ends to attain. Rebecca and Jacob ought, like Abraham, to have had confidence in God, and said: "The Almighty and Allwise God will carry out His own will, even if we cannot see how." Instead of this, they took divine providence into their own hands, and committed a sin. Thus, want of faith and confidence in God was the real cause of their sin.

Temporal punishment. Esau's indifference was punished by the loss of the rights of the first-born, not only to himself, but to all his descendants, the Edomites. Rebecca and Jacob were, also, punished in this world. Jacob confessed and repented of his sin, and, therefore, God forgave him, but he did penance for it during many a long year. As you will read in the following chapters, he had to flee from his brother, and serve for twenty years in a strange land. Later in his life he was caused much grief by his own sons, who deceived him even more cruelly than he deceived Isaac, making out that a wild beast had devoured his dear son Joseph. Thus severely had he to expiate his one sin! Rebecca, who had sinned through love of Jacob, was punished by having to part with him, and never see him again in this life. In all this the divine justice is most clearly seen.

The Wisdom of God, which makes good to come out of evil, can be learnt from this story. Almighty God had from the beginning, or rather from all eternity, chosen Jacob to be the heir of His promises. The faults of men (such as Isaac's preference for Esau, Jacob's deceit, and Esau's hatred) could not alter what He had ordained; on the contrary, they served, under the divine guidance, for the accomplishment of it. Jacob, especially, was strengthened in confidence in God, and purified by the very consequences of his deceit, his long exile and servitude. He was by them confirmed in humility and piety, and trained to be a holy man of God, and the worthy heir of the promises.

III. Application.

Esau sinned through his greedy desire for the pottage. Have you never sinned by gluttony? Try for the future to overcome your greedy desires. Bear hunger and thirst for a short time with cheerfulness; and be not dainty about your food. He who does not tame his appetites, and deny himself, cannot be virtuous or happy.

Jacob ought to have given the mess willingly to his hungry brother. Have you never been selfish towards your brothers and sisters, and wished to keep everything for yourself, or chosen the best or largest portion for yourself?

Do you ever tell lies? Some day you must make satisfaction for every lie. God hates lies, because He is the very truth. If you wish to be a child of God, always tell the truth. "Lying lips are an abomination to the Lord" (Prov. 12, 22).

CHAPTER XVI.

JACOB'S FLIGHT AND HIS SOJOURN WITH LABAN.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

ESAU was very angry, because he had lost the blessing. He resolved to kill Jacob. Rebecca knew the evil intentions of Esau, and saw that the life of Jacob was in danger¹.



She, therefore, called Jacob and said to him: "My son, flee to Laban, my brother², and dwell with him, till the wrath of thy brother hath passed away."³ Jacob at once set out⁴. As he went on, it happened that

night overtook him in an open plain. Being tired from the journey, he lay down on the ground and slept, having a stone for a pillow⁵. In his sleep he saw a ladder standing upon the earth, the top touching heaven; and by it the angels of God ascended and descended. The Lord was leaning upon the ladder and said to him: "I am the Lord God of Abraham, thy father, and the God of Isaac⁶. The land wherein thou sleepest I will

give to thee and to thy seed. And thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth; and in thee and thy seed all the tribes of the earth shall be blessed."

¹ Rebecca knew this by the threatening looks and hostile bearing of Esau. — ² In Haran. You know already that Abraham had lived for a long time in Haran, before he came to Chanaan. Nachor, Abraham's brother, had remained there. His son was Bathuel, and Rebecca and Laban were his grandchildren. It was to this Laban, her brother, that Rebecca now told her son to go. — ³ Esau's anger had passed into hatred, and hatred into fury and thirst for his brother's blood. Rebecca rightly hoped that, when Esau no longer saw his brother, this fury would die away. — ⁴ How sad Jacob must have felt, when he bade farewell to his beloved parents, and went out into an unknown land. Sad at heart, and with his staff in his hand, he started forth, not knowing whether he would ever reach the end of his journey, or ever return home again. At that time Isaac was living at Bersabee, on the southern borders of Chanaan (see map), and from thence to Haran was more than two hundred miles. — ⁵ Jacob had already travelled for several days, and when he arrived, tired out, at Bethel (four hours' journey north of Jerusalem), he had to sleep in the open air. Wild beasts might have devoured him, or hostile men might have seized him and taken him prisoner. But Jacob trusted in God: he prayed fervently, and commended himself to the care of the Almighty. Then, God comforted him by revealing Himself to him in a dream. — ⁶ i. e. the same God who appeared to thy grandfather Abraham and thy father Isaac, and gave them the promises. Almighty God, then, repeated to Jacob the same promises, namely that the land of Chanaan should belong to his descendants; that his posterity should be very numerous, and that of his family should be born the Redeemer.

And when Jacob awoke from sleep, he said: "Indeed, the Lord is in this place, and I knew it not.⁷ How terrible is this place!⁸ This is no other but the house of God⁹ and the gate of heaven."¹⁰ As soon as morning dawned, he took the stone upon which his head had lain during the vision, and set it up as a monument; he, also, poured oil upon it¹¹, in honour of God, and changed the name of the place from Luza to Bethel, that is to say, the house of God. He, also, made a vow, saying: "If God shall be with me, and I shall return prosperously to my father's house, the Lord shall be my God; and of all things that Thou shalt give me I will offer tithes to Thee."

This being done, he continued his journey, and having come to a well near which three flocks of sheep were lying, he addressed the shepherds who were tending their flocks, saying: "Brethren, whence are you?" They answered: "Of Haran." He, then, asked them, if they knew Laban, the son of Nachor. They replied: "We know him: and behold! Rachel, his daughter, cometh with his flock." When Rachel drew near, Jacob met her in a friendly manner, and rolled the stone from the mouth of the well so that her flock might drink. He informed Rachel that he was the son of Rebecca, her father's sister. She joyfully ran home and announced the glad tidings to her father who, coming out, embraced Jacob and, then, conducted him to his house. Jacob remained twenty years with Laban, tending his flocks with great care and fidelity¹². But Laban tried, by various unjust means, to withhold from Jacob a part of the hire to which he was justly entitled. Nevertheless, God blessed Jacob, and he became rich in flocks, and herds, and servants.

⁷ Is not God, then, everywhere? Yes; but God appeared visibly and spoke to Jacob in this place. — ⁸ Jacob cried out in this way, because the fear of God had seized him. — ⁹ Because Almighty God had shown Himself visibly there. — ¹⁰ He calls the place the gate, or door, of heaven, because heaven had there opened itself before him, and he had gazed upon God and His holy angels. — ¹¹ He placed the stone on which he had rested his head, upright, to serve as a memorial of the wonderful vision of God; and, anointing it with oil, he consecrated it to God. By virtue of God's promises to him, Jacob had become a patriarch, and the patriarchs were not only the *heads*, but, also, the *priests* of their families, and offered sacrifice. It was only in the time of Moses that God instituted a special priesthood (Old Test. XXXIX). It was by right of his priestly dignity that Jacob consecrated the memorial stone. — ¹² And God increased Laban's riches, for Jacob's sake. He, being blessed of God, brought a blessing on the master whom he served.

II. Commentary.

All good things come from God. When Jacob made his vow, he did not say: "Of all things that I shall gain I will offer tithes to Thee", but: "Of all things that Thou shalt give me". By these words the holy servant of God expressed his conviction that any riches or possessions which he might

acquire, would all be a gift from God. Every true believer in God ought to say thus: "From Thee, O God, comes every gift. I thank Thee for what I am, and what I have."

The fourth promise of the Messias. The promise of the Redeemer was made to Jacob in these words: "In thy seed shall all the tribes of the earth be blessed", i. e. by one of your descendants shall grace and blessings be brought to all mankind. Who is this Descendant of Jacob's?

Our holy Guardian Angels. What does the heavenly ladder signify? Do the holy angels require a ladder, by which to ascend into heaven and descend to the earth? No! for they can pass to and from heaven with the swiftness of thought! God made this heavenly ladder to appear to Jacob so that he might understand that he was not forsaken; and that the holy angels had him in sight, took his prayers and good works to the throne of God, and returned to earth in order to stand by him and protect him. The angels help us in the same way, being, as St. Paul tells us "ministering spirits, sent to minister to them who shall receive the inheritance of salvation" (Hebr. 1, 14). "That which Almighty God showed visibly to Jacob for his comfort, takes place continually, in an invisible manner, with those whom God loves. Day and night, even when they are asleep, God looks down on them, well pleased, and has given His angels to them to be their guardians. These holy angels ascend and descend the heavenly ladder. They ascend, to carry the sighs and prayers of the just, to offer them as fragrant incense before the throne of God; they descend so as to bring back to them help, strength and consolation from above" (Overberg). Compare Old Test. LXIX, 6, where the Archangel Raphael says to Tobias: "When thou didst pray with tears, and didst bury the dead, I offered thy prayer to the Lord." The holy angels are, therefore, ever working for our good.

Every Catholic church is a house of God and gate of heaven. The words of Jacob: "How terrible is this place! This is no other but the house of God, and the gate of heaven!" apply to every Catholic church still more than they applied to Bethel. For every Catholic church is, in very deed, a

house of God, because every day, in the holy sacrifice of the mass, our Divine Saviour descends on to the altar, is there present under the form of bread and wine, and remains there with us, day and night, in the Most Blessed Sacrament. Every Catholic church is, also, a gate of heaven, because in it the one true faith is taught, and the Sacraments of Baptism, Penance and the Holy Eucharist are continually administered, through which we receive the remission of our sins, and obtain grace and life everlasting. Those words of the God-fearing Jacob might well be written over the entrance of every one of our churches. And, as for us, we ought to be very devout and recollected in the house of God.

Vows. Jacob vowed to God that, if he returned safe to Chanaan, he would build an altar at Bethel and offer sacrifices to God; and you will see that, later on, Jacob faithfully kept his vow. We learn by this vow of Jacob's that, even in quite ancient days, God-fearing men used to make vows to God, and that He was well pleased with such holy vows; for He gave Jacob everything for which he prayed, when he made that vow.

Diligence. Jacob served his uncle diligently and faithfully. All who love and fear God, try to fulfil faithfully the duties of their state of life. Diligence is a virtue, if we are working, each one in his state, for the glory of God. — Sloth is a sin, and one of the capital sins.

The efficacy of Penance. Jacob's separation from his parents, and his long and hard servitude were a penance for his sin; and as he practised these penances willingly, they were pleasing to God, Who forgave him his sin, and bestowed many blessings on him. Jacob left home quite poor, and returned a rich man. His confidence in God was richly rewarded. Nothing avails without the blessing of God.

The ladder of Jacob's vision, a type of the Redemption. This ladder stood on the earth, and its top reached to heaven, even to the throne of God; and thus it joined earth to heaven. By sin, this earth (or the men living on earth) had separated itself from heaven (from God). Men had become the enemies of God, and no man could attain to heaven. It is impossible to reach heaven by any human strength or effort, as the men who built Babel tried to do: heaven must first

bow itself towards the earth, so as to draw men back to God. Therefore, the Son of God came down from heaven, and, by so doing, put an end to the enmity between heaven and earth. He made satisfaction for us, and regained for us the grace and inheritance of heaven which we had lost. Jesus Christ is the true heavenly ladder. By His teaching He has shown us the way to heaven and has won for us grace, in the strength of which we may climb up. Almighty God showed Jacob, by this vision, that some day the Redeemer would restore the union between heaven and earth, and would open to all men the way to heaven.

Oil is the type of grace. Even as oil illuminates, softens, strengthens and heals, so does the grace of the Holy Ghost illuminate, comfort, strengthen and heal the human soul. Thus, under the Old Law, men (priests and kings), as well as things, which were dedicated to the service of God, were anointed with oil. Under the New Law, Jesus Christ has made oil to be a great means of grace in the holy Sacraments of Confirmation, Extreme Unction and Holy Order. The holy oils are blessed on Maundy-Thursaday.

III. Application.

Jacob had a great reverence for the place where God had appeared to him. Our churches are still holier places, and yet you often behave irreverently in church; your thoughts wander, you look about you, and you even laugh and talk! Examine your conscience on this point, and make resolutions of amendment. "The Lord is in His holy temple: let all the earth keep silence before Him!" (Hab. 2, 20.) Each time you enter a church, say to yourself: "This is the house of God; this is the gate of heaven."

Are you as diligent as Jacob was? Do you learn your lessons, and especially your catechism, diligently? Are you willing to help your parents, or your brothers and sisters, in their work? Resolve to overcome slothfulness, and to fulfil your duties faithfully for the love of God.

CHAPTER XVII.

JACOB RETURNS HOME, AND IS RECONCILED WITH HIS BROTHER.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

WHEN Laban saw that Jacob had become very rich, he began to envy him, and ceased to regard him with favour. Then God said to Jacob: "Return into the land of

thy fathers¹. I will be with thee.”² Jacob rose up without delay, and set out with all he possessed. He had reached the banks of the river Jordan, when he began to fear on account of his brother. He sent messengers before him to say to Esau: “Let me find favour in thy sight!”³ The messengers returned, saying to Jacob: “Esau cometh with speed to meet thee, with four hundred men.” Then Jacob was sore afraid⁴, and he thus prayed: “God of my fathers, O Lord, Who saidst to me, ‘Return to thy land’, I am not worthy of the least of all Thy mercies, and of Thy truth which Thou hast fulfilled to Thy servant. With my staff I passed over this Jordan, and now I return with two companies. Deliver me from the hand of my brother!”

¹ To the land of Chanaan where his grandfather Abraham had lived, and where his father Isaac still lived. — ² I will protect thee. God said this, because Jacob was still in fear of the fury of Esau. —

³ Act not as an enemy to me, but forgive me the wrong I did you. —

⁴ Jacob had every reason to be afraid that Esau was coming at the head of four hundred men so as to take him prisoner, or kill him.

During the night⁵ an angel appeared to Jacob with whom he wrestled⁶ till morning. And Jacob said to the angel; “I will not let thee go, except thou bless me.”⁷ The angel said to him: “Henceforth thy name shall not be called Jacob, but Israel,” that is to say, one who has wrestled with God.

⁵ Jacob had made all those with him go forward, while he himself remained alone behind, so as to begin this most eventful day by fervent prayer. — ⁶ Wrestling is that kind of combat in which, without the giving of any blows, one man tries to throw the other to the ground. The angel could easily have overthrown Jacob, if he wished it, for “he touched the sinew of Jacob’s thigh, and forthwith it shrivelled up, and Jacob, from that time forward, limped on one foot, because the sinew of his thigh was shrunken”. This lameness was to be to him a constant reminder of his strife, and a warning to be humble. Jacob was aware that he had to do with a supernatural being, on which account he asked for his blessing. — ⁷ The mysterious being who appeared to Jacob, while he was praying, and wrestled with him, was the “Angel of the Covenant”, i. e. the Son of God, Who, assuming a human form, allowed Himself to be apparently overcome by Jacob, as an encouragement to him, and a proof that he need fear nothing from Esau. It was to prove this to him that the angel said: “If thou

hast been strong against God, how much more shalt thou prevail against men" (Gen. 32, 28).

The following explanation may help you to a deeper understanding of this mysterious event. A very important and decisive day lay before Jacob, and he might well ask: Would he reach the Promised Land in safety; and would God's promises, so all important for the salvation of the world, be fulfilled? These questions did not only affect himself, but the whole of mankind, to the remotest future. At that moment Almighty God condescended to His chosen servant. The struggle to which he was subjected was a trial, similar to that mortal struggle which Abraham had to go through, when commanded to sacrifice his only son — a struggle for life and death, such as our Lord, the great Wrestler with God, had to endure in His Agony in the Garden. Jacob overcame, because his faith was invincible, and he came out of the struggle, strengthened and encouraged to live for his own and our salvation.

He then divided his children, his servants, and his flocks into companies, and putting himself at the head of one of them, he advanced to meet his brother, bowing seven times to the ground before him⁸. But Esau, rejoiced to see his brother Jacob, ran to meet him and embraced him with many tears. Then, perceiving the children, he asked: "Whose are those?" Jacob replied: "They are the children which God hath given me." And, making a sign to them, they all advanced, and bowed down before Esau. Jacob then presented Esau with several flocks. But Esau refused them, saying: "I have plenty, my brother, keep what is thine for thyself!" Jacob insisted, and said: "I beseech thee, take the blessing which God hath given me!" Then Esau yielded to his prayer⁹, and Jacob, full of gratitude for the protection of God, continued his journey, and arrived in the land of Chanaan, where his aged father dwelt. Isaac was happy that his son had returned, and lived after this about twenty years. Finally, enfeebled by age, he died, one hundred and eighty years old. Esau and Jacob buried him at Hebron¹⁰.

⁸ He humbled himself before his brother in order to awake kindly feelings in Esau. — ⁹ By this acceptance of gifts, the reconciliation was finally sealed. — ¹⁰ in the cave where Abraham and Rebecca were already buried.

II. Commentary.

All things come from God. When Jacob offered several flocks to his brother, he uttered these beautiful words: "Take

of the blessing which God hath given me." He confessed thereby that it was God who had given to him, preserved, and increased his flocks.

Faithfulness of God. This story shows how God fulfilled His promise: "I will be thy keeper, and will bring thee back into this land."

Keeping vows. Jacob, too, was faithful, and kept his vow. As soon as he had parted from Esau, he went to Bethel, and made there an altar. Picture to yourself how he knelt down before the altar, with all his household, and thanked Almighty God from the bottom of his heart.

Necessity makes people pray. In his great fear Jacob had recourse to God. We, too, ought to turn to God for help, comfort and strength in times of trial, fear and need. "Our help is in the name of the Lord who made heaven and earth" (Ps. 123, 8). The holy apostle James says: "Is any of you sad? Let him pray" (James 5, 13).

Prayer does not dispense us from helping ourselves. Jacob did not only pray to God, but he did all that lay in his own power to propitiate his brother. He sent messengers to beg his favour; he sent him presents, and humbled himself, bowing down seven times before him. We should act as he did, in our times of need or sickness. We should, indeed, pray, but we should not sit with our hands before us, but should use every lawful means to help ourselves.

Prayer must be persevering. The holy patriarch, wrestling with God, is a figure of persevering prayer. As Jacob wrestled and cried out: "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me"; so ought we never to give up praying, until we have been heard. Almighty God wills that we should, as it were, wrestle with Him in prayer, do violence to Him, and storm Him with our petitions. By doing so, we become more worthy to obtain what we ask. See the parable of the importunate friend (New Test. XLVIII).

The power of prayer. We can see by Esau's conduct how powerful and effective Jacob's prayer was. For Esau still bore his brother a grudge, and came with four hundred men to seize him. But, on account of Jacob's prayer, God changed

Esau's hard heart, and he became friendly towards his brother, and fell on his neck, and kissed him, weeping with emotion. See in what a manner God can change the hearts of men! "As the division of waters, so the heart of the king is in the hand of the Lord: whithersoever He will he shall turn it."

Hatefulness of envy. Not only was Jacob blessed by God, but, for his sake, God prospered Laban as well. And yet, Laban envied his son-in-law, and was unfriendly to him (Jacob had married the two daughters of Laban, Lia and Rachel). We can see by Laban's conduct what a foolish, hateful, and unjust vice envy is.

It is noble to forgive. What is the feeling of your heart, as you picture to yourself those two brothers weeping, and embracing one another? Is it not a moving sight? Do you not like Esau, forgiving and weeping, a thousand times better than Esau, angry and vindictive? Is it not, therefore, a beautiful and noble thing to forgive those who have injured us? "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us."

Parents are the representatives of God to their children. Jacob said, speaking of his children: "They are the children which God hath given to me." God gives children to their parents to bring them up for Him, to love and serve Him. On this account, parents are to their children the representatives of God, and children ought to honour them as such.

Jesus Christ, the Author of all grace. The blessing which Jacob wrung from God, is a figure of the great gift of grace which Jesus Christ, the true Israel, wrung from heaven for us by His sufferings and death.

III. Application.

Do you ever refuse to make friends with your brothers and sisters, or any other children who have injured you? Do you not nurse a feeling of resentment? Are you not ill-natured to them? Do you not wish them evil? Do you ask pardon of others (as, for example, your parents), when you have done wrong, and grieved them? Do you begin a quarrel easily? Forgive everyone from your heart! Be at peace with everybody, and especially with your brothers and sisters!

Do not aggravate or strike anyone! It is far better to suffer wrong than to do wrong. Say to-day an "Our Father" for all those who have done you any injury!

CHAPTER XVIII.

JOSEPH SOLD BY HIS BRETHREN.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

JACOB had twelve sons, and he loved Joseph above all the others, because he was young and very good. And Jacob made him a coat of divers colours¹. One day, when the brothers were all tending their flocks, some of them committed a most wicked crime. Joseph, being shocked and angry, told his father, on his return home, what he had seen. From that time forward, his brothers hated Joseph, and could not speak to him kindly. Joseph had once a remarkable dream² which he thus related to his brothers: "Hear my dream: I thought we were binding sheaves in the field, and my sheaf arose, as it were, and stood, and your sheaves, standing about, bowed down before my sheaf." His brothers replied: "Shalt thou be our king? Or shall we be subject to thy dominion?" And they hated him more than ever³. Joseph dreamed, also, that the sun, the moon and eleven stars worshipped him. His father rebuked⁴ him, saying: "What meaneth this dream? Shall I, and thy mother, and thy brethren, worship thee upon the earth?" But Jacob thought within himself that perhaps God had destined Joseph for great things⁵.

¹ A coat of many-coloured and rich materials. Jacob's preference for Joseph was justifiable, because the boy was so innocent and pious, but his father ought to have had the good sense not to prefer him to his brothers so openly. — ² This was a supernatural dream, not an ordinary one. — ³ His brethren envied him, first, the preference shown him by their father, as exemplified by the gift of the beautiful coat: secondly, they hated him for having revealed their misdeeds to Jacob; and, lastly, their hatred of him was increased by the fact that Joseph's dreams seemed to foreshow that he would, one day, rule over them. — ⁴ Jacob scolded him for repeating his dreams to his brothers, and tried to remove the idea from his mind that these dreams meant anything. — ⁵ He pondered over the meaning of Joseph's dreams. He



suspected that they had been sent by God, and that God destined Joseph for something great. But he did not reveal his thoughts to Joseph, for fear of making him vainglorious.

One day, when the sons of Jacob had gone with their flocks to Sichem⁶, Jacob said to Joseph: "Go and see, if all things be well with thy brethren and the cattle!" He obeyed, and went in search of them. When they saw him afar off, they said: "Behold, the dreamer cometh. Let us kill him and cast him into some old pit, and we will say some evil beast hath devoured him; and, then, it shall appear what his dreams avail him." Reuben, the eldest of the brothers, hearing this, sought to deliver Joseph out of their hands, and said to them: "Do not take away his life, nor shed his blood, but cast him into this pit."⁷ This he said, because he wished to restore the boy to his father. When Joseph drew near to his brothers, they forthwith stripped him of his coat of divers colours, and cast him into the pit, in which, happily, there was no water⁸. Then they sat down to eat bread, and saw some foreign merchants passing

by, with camels, carrying spices, balm and myrrh into Egypt. Juda then said to his brothers: "What will it profit us to kill our brother? It is better that he be sold, and that our hands be not defiled, for he is our brother." The others agreed, and, the merchants having come up, they drew Joseph out of the pit, and sold him for twenty pieces of silver⁹. Joseph wept and besought them to have pity upon him, but in vain. The merchants took him away with them into Egypt¹⁰.

⁶ Jacob lived in Hebron; and from thence to Sichem (or Sichar) was a distance of fifty-five miles. — ⁷ A deep pit walled in, in which rain-water was collected, and which was then covered over with a stone. At the time that Reuben made his proposal, it was dry. — ⁸ Imagine to yourself how Joseph must have wept, and prayed for mercy: "Ah. spare me, my brothers! Am I to die of hunger and thirst in that pit! Think of our old father, how he will mourn, if I do not return to him! Think of the justice of God, and how He will punish you as He punished Cain! What have I done to harm you?" But his brothers had no compassion, and cast him without mercy into the pit; and then sat down to eat, just as if nothing had happened. — ⁹ This was the usual price of a young slave. His brethren sold him as a slave, out of covetousness. As a slave, his owner could do as he pleased with him, and he was no more thought of than a beast, or any other piece of merchandise which could be had for money. (See picture p. 103.) — ¹⁰ This country lies to the N.-E. of Africa (see map) and was inhabited by pagans.

Reuben, being absent at the moment, knew nothing of this wicked bargain¹¹. On going to the pit into which Joseph had been cast, and not finding him there¹², he rent his garments in despair, saying: "The boy doth not appear, and whither shall I go?"¹³ The other brothers remained quite unconcerned. Having killed a kid, they dipped Joseph's coat in it, and sent it to their father, saying: "This we have found; see, if it be thy son's coat, or no." The father, knowing the coat, said: "It is my son's coat; a wild beast hath devoured Joseph." Then he rent his garments, and putting on sackcloth, mourned his son a long time. His children gathered around and strove to soothe his grief¹⁴, but he would not be comforted¹⁵, saying: "I will go down to my son¹⁶ into the grave¹⁷, mourning." Jacob thus expressed his belief in the immortality of the soul.

¹¹ He had not been present, when Joseph was sold. — ¹² He went to look for him, in order to take him out and save him. — ¹³ What shall I do? I dare not face my father! — ¹⁴ They pretended that they also grieved, because Joseph was no more. — ¹⁵ He mourned without ceasing. — ¹⁶ I care no more to live. I wish to die, so that I may join my beloved Joseph. — ¹⁷ to Limbo, where the souls of the just were detained.

II. Commentary.

Innocent youth. It is impossible not to love the innocent and obedient Joseph, who did not follow his brothers' evil example, and who was such a joy to his father! Nothing is more beautiful than a holy, untarnished youth. God's blessing rests on him as it did on Joseph; for it was on account of Joseph's holy and innocent youth that God chose him for such high things. He who passes his youth in innocence, and is a joy to his parents, will look back to his young days with pleasure, even when he is an old man. On the contrary, if a man stains his beautiful youth with sins and vices, and is a grief to his parents, the memory of his early days will be as a gnawing worm to him for the rest of his life.

Revealing the faults of others. Now, was it nice or right of Joseph to tell his father about his brothers' sin? One says 'Yes', and another says, 'No'; and both are apparently right. If Joseph had taken pleasure in revealing his brothers' sin, and had hoped to bring punishment on them by doing so, he would have acted very wrongly. He would, also, have sinned, had he revealed the wrong done, to anyone but his father; for that would have been a sin of detraction. Joseph, however, had no bad intention, when he told his father what he knew, but acted out of true love both for God and his brothers, in order that his father might warn them and exercise supervision over them, and that thus his brothers might amend their ways, and not offend God any more. The revelation being necessary, it was Joseph's duty to make it. If he had kept silence about his brothers' sin, he would have shared the guilt of it. Had he not told his father, he would have been to blame, if his brothers' had sinned again in the same way. You can learn this important rule by Joseph's conduct on this occasion: Never reveal the faults of others

without necessity; but you must (and more especially, if you are asked) reveal them to those who have the right to know, such as your parents, masters &c.; and this, in order that the wrong doing may be stopped.

Dreams. Joseph's dreams are called supernatural, because they were sent by God, and had a prophetic meaning. God has often shown men His will by means of dreams. Take, for example, the three kings whom God commanded in a dream not to return to Herod (New Test. VIII). Such dreams are supernatural, because they have a hidden meaning, and God reveals His will through them. It might happen, even now, that God should make known something to some holy person by means of a dream; but in a general way, dreams mean nothing, and are quite ordinary and natural. We possess the teaching of Jesus Christ, by which to know the will of God; and we must pay no attention to dreams and omens, or else we shall sin by superstition.

The power of passions. The example of Joseph's brethren shows us, once more, to how many sins one passion can lead. The beginning of these men's sin was envy. Hatred, abusive language, and thirst for blood grew from it. They were heartless and cruel, turned a deaf ear to Joseph's lamentations, and sold him into the miseries of slavery. They lied to their father ("We have found this coat &c."), embittered his life, and counterfeited compassion for his grief. What a multitude of sins; and they all sprang from envy! Therefore, envy is a capital sin.

The evil consequences of one venial sin. This story teaches us that small causes (such as little faults and venial sins) produce great effects, and have very evil consequences. It was weak minded and foolish of Jacob to parade his preference for Joseph; but this, in itself, was not a great sin. However, it roused the envy of his other sons, and brought much suffering and sorrow both to Jacob and Joseph. So, let us be on our guard against even the smallest faults.

Omission of what we ought to do. Reuben and Juda were the two brothers who sinned less than the others. Juda, at least, saved Joseph's life; and, as for Reuben — well it might be said that he had no share in his brothers' sin, because he wished to save Joseph, and took no part in selling

him. Nevertheless, he cannot be exonerated from blame. He ought to have openly and decidedly opposed his brothers' blood-thirsty plan, and boldly protected Joseph. Then, after he learnt that Joseph had been sold, he ought to have told the truth to his sorrowing father, who would have sent to Egypt, to seek and ransom Joseph. Reuben, therefore, sinned by omitting to do what he ought to have done.

God can make good come out of evil. Joseph's brethren said to themselves: "If we sell Joseph to be a slave in Egypt, his dreams will come to nothing, and he will never rule over us." But God's wisdom decreed that it was in Egypt that Joseph was to be exalted, and his brethren humbled before him.

Immortality of the soul. Jacob knew and believed that he would, one day, rejoin Joseph, even though he were dead. He knew that everything does not finish with death, but that there is an eternal life to come after this passing one.

III. Application.

Take great pains to deserve the love of your parents by your obedience, filial love &c.

Do you wish for smart clothes? Do you wish to be distinguished from other children by your finery? God does not look to the clothes, but to the heart which ought to be adorned with virtues.

Perhaps you have often published abroad the faults of others without any necessity. On the other hand, you may have concealed what you know, from those set over you, who have a right to know. By doing so you have shared in the guilt of others.

You see in Jacob's case how very strong is the love which parents have for their children. Should not children be very grateful for the love and care shown them by their parents, and try to be a joy to them? Ask yourself if you have ever vexed, irritated, or grieved your parents, and resolve that, for the future, you will be a joy to them by your obedience and diligence. And do not forget to pray every day for them.

Joseph's brethren scoffed at him as a dreamer. Do you not often tease your brothers and sisters and comrades, and give them abusive names? You must not let this ugly habit take possession of you, for you do not like others to give you such names. Do unto others as you would they should do to you!

CHAPTER XIX.

JOSEPH IN THE HOUSE OF PUTIPHAR.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

ON arriving in Egypt, the merchants sold Joseph to Putiphar, the captain of the royal guard¹. And the Lord was with Joseph, blessing him in all he did; wherefore he found favour with his master who gave him charge of all his household². And the Lord blessed the house of the Egyptian, for Joseph's sake, and multiplied his riches. But, after some time, Joseph was severely tried in his new home. The wife of Putiphar urged him to commit a most grievous sin. But Joseph would not consent, and said: "Behold, my master hath delivered all things to me. How, then, can I do this wicked thing, and sin against my God?" But even this decided refusal did not prevent the wicked woman from renewing her attacks on Joseph's virtue, and every day she importuned him anew³. But Joseph would not listen to her.

Now, it so happened that Joseph was, one day, alone in the house, attending to some business, when the woman took hold of the skirt of his cloak⁴, and renewed her shameful proposal. But Joseph fled, leaving his cloak in her hands. The woman, seeing herself thus slighted, began to hate Joseph, and accused him to her husband of attempting the very crime which she had tried in vain to induce him to commit.

Putiphar, believing his wife too easily⁵, caused the innocent young man to be cast into prison⁶. The chaste Joseph is, in his firm resistance to temptation, a model for all young people. This history teaches us, also, that in this world the good have sometimes to suffer unjustly, but that, if they remain patient and pray for their enemies, as Joseph did, then their suffering will soon be turned into joy.

¹ The soldiers whose duty it was to defend the king's life, and see to his safety. — ² He made Joseph the overseer or steward of his house. — ³ Day after day, she tried to persuade him to sin; and this was wearisome and hateful to him. — ⁴ in order to force him to sin. — ⁵ without examining the case, or hearing Joseph's version of the story. — ⁶ in the state-prison. There Joseph, who was then twenty six years old, was loaded with fetters (Ps. 104, 18).

II. Commentary.

Piety. The fate of Joseph was a hard one, being thus torn away from his home and father, and taken to the market, to be sold as a slave. But Joseph did not despond. No doubt, the wrong he had suffered made his heart ache; but he trusted in God, prayed diligently, and submitted himself to God's will. He was a true worshipper of God. The end proved that his trust in Him was justified. By Almighty God's providence, Joseph was bought by Putiphar, who began to love him on account of his virtues, and placed him, the least among his slaves, in a position of trust over his whole household. Therefore, St. Paul says: "Godliness is profitable to all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (1 Tim. 4, 8).

Performance of the duty of our state in life. Because Joseph feared God, he served his master so faithfully and zealously that Putiphar loved and praised him, and made him his steward over everything. He who wishes to serve God must, before all things, fulfil the duties of his state of life, faithfully and conscientiously.

Holy fear of God. A deep fear of God, and a hatred of sin were the fruits of Joseph's piety. When tempted to sin, he cried out, full of horror: "How can I do this wicked thing, and sin against my God!" He said to himself: "Mortal sin is the greatest of all evils. How could I offend the Lord my God Who has so graciously created, preserved and protected me!" The fear of God is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost.

The blessing attending piety. In the same way that God blessed Laban, for Jacob's sake, so did He bless Putiphar, for the sake of the God-fearing Joseph. Holy servants and holy children bring a blessing on a house, namely, many graces and often temporal prosperity.

Scandal. Putiphar's wife tried to induce Joseph to sin against the Sixth Commandment. Had he listened to this bad woman, he would have lost the grace and friendship of God. She wished to do him a spiritual injury, and thereby sinned against the Fifth Commandment.

Calumny. Putiphar's wife calumniated Joseph, or accused him falsely to her husband, so as to revenge herself on him for having resisted her evil suggestions. By this, she was the guilty cause of the innocent Joseph being deprived of his liberty, and cast into prison.

Rash judgment. Putiphar sinned by condemning Joseph, without careful investigation of the accusation brought against him. Such a sin is called rash judgment.

Means of preserving chastity. The sin which Putiphar's wicked wife wished to induce Joseph to commit was one against chastity. This temptation was a severe one to Joseph, for, do what he could, she would not leave him alone. She argued that the sin would not be a very great one; that no one need know about it, and so forth. She, furthermore, flattered him and promised him riches, if he would consent, and threatened to do him great injury, if he refused. Nevertheless, Joseph remained firm, and would not yield to the temptation. He loved the virtue of purity. He knew that want of chastity is the most shameful of all sins, and he carefully guarded himself against it. To do so, he used the following means: 1. He kept as much as he could out of this woman's way. He would not have been in her house that day, had not business called him there; and when she tried to detain him, he fled. 2. Before going into the house, he armed himself against the temptation by praying to God for strength. 3. Each time this wicked woman tempted him, he thought of God Who sees everything, and Who has a special hatred of sins against chastity. If you wish to preserve your innocence, dear children, you must do as Joseph did. You must avoid the occasions of sin, bad companions, and all unclean thoughts. You must appeal for help to God and His holy Mother; and you must think of God's presence, of death, and hell. You have far more powerful means of preserving your innocence than Joseph had in Egypt, for you have the holy Sacraments of Penance and of the Altar. If you receive these often and worthily, you will be able to resist all temptations. Joseph remained chaste, though he did not possess these mighty means of grace. Your sin will be far greater than his would have been, if you lose your innocence in spite of them.

III. Application.

Joseph's temptation was a severe one, and yet he stood firm. Have you not let yourself be led into sin by far lesser

temptations? Joseph paid no heed to the threats of this wicked woman, but feared God more than her. He preferred to suffer anything, even death, rather than offend God. Repent of your sins, and say often to God: "I will die rather than offend Thee."

Do you love purity as dearly as holy Joseph loved it? Would you preserve your innocence at any cost? Your innocence should be dearer to you than anything in the world, for it is the most priceless treasure you possess. Avoid, therefore, all occasions of sin, bad companions, and impure things. "My son, if sinners shall entice thee, consent not to them! If they shall say, 'Come with us,' walk not thou with them!" (Prov. 1, 10 &c.). Say every day a Hail Mary for the preservation of your innocence.

CHAPTER XX.

JOSEPH IN PRISON.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

JOSEPH was now pining in prison, among criminals. But even here God did not abandon him, and caused him to find favour in the sight of the keeper of the prison, who gave him charge of all the prisoners. Amongst these were the chief butler¹ and the chief baker² of Pharaoh, accused of treason against their king. After some time, they both, on the same night, had a dream which perplexed them and made them sad.

Joseph, perceiving their sadness, asked them³, saying: "Why is your countenance sadder to-day than usual?" They answered: "We have dreamed a dream, and there is nobody to interpret it to us." Joseph said to them: "Doth not interpretation belong to God?⁴ Tell me what you have dreamed."

The chief butler first told his dream: "I saw before me a vine on which were three branches which by little and little sent out buds; and afterwards the blossoms brought forth ripe grapes. And the cup of Pharaoh was in my hand, and I took the grapes, and pressed them into the cup which I held, and I gave the cup to Pharaoh."

Joseph answered: "This is the interpretation of the dream: The three branches are yet three days, after which Pharaoh will restore thee to thy former place, and thou shalt present him the cup as before. Only remember me, when it shall be well with thee, and do me this kindness, to put Pharaoh in mind to take me out of this prison!"

¹ This was the name given to that officer in the king's court whose duty it was to examine and pour out the wine which the king drank. — ² The duty of the chief baker was to bake the bread for the king, and, above all, to examine it, before the king ate it. — ³ full of sympathy for their trouble. — ⁴ By this Joseph meant: "Only those dreams which are sent by God have any special meaning, and he alone who is inspired by God to do so, can interpret such dreams."

Then the chief baker, seeing that Joseph had so wisely interpreted the dream, said: "I, also, dreamed a dream that I had three baskets of meal upon my head; and that in one basket which was uppermost I carried all kinds of pastry, and that the birds ate out of it."

Joseph said to him: "This is the interpretation of the dream: The three baskets are yet three days, after which Pharaoh will take thy head from thee and hang thee on a cross, and the birds shall tear thy flesh."⁵ The third day after this was the birthday of Pharaoh.

At the banquet⁶ he remembered the chief butler and chief baker. The former he restored to his place; the latter he caused to be hanged on a gibbet⁷. The chief butler rejoiced in his good fortune, but he thought no more of Joseph.

⁵ In olden times a criminal was first beheaded, and then his body was hung on a gibbet, as a warning to others. — ⁶ at the feast, given by Pharaoh on the occasion. — ⁷ Apparently, the chief butler's offence was not so great as that of the chief baker, and, therefore, the king pardoned him on his birthday.

II. Commentary.

The object of suffering. Joseph really had a great deal to endure. At home, after being derided by his brethren, he was sold to be a slave in a strange land. Then, though innocent, he was thrown into prison and bound with chains, as if he were the worst of criminals. He had, apparently, lost everything now, home, freedom and honour, but he still

kept what was best of all, his innocence and his confidence in God. Every kind of external misfortune had befallen him, but he still had a good conscience, and the peace of God in his heart, so that, in spite of everything, he was still inwardly happy. But we ask: "Why did Almighty God allow this holy, innocent Joseph to be burdened by so many troubles?" The answer is: "He allowed it in order that Joseph might be confirmed in virtue, and prepared by these humiliations for his future exalted position. All the sufferings which God allows to befall the just, are for this same end; only their exaltation does not always take place in this world, but generally in the next."

God does not forsake his servants. God was with Joseph, that is, He comforted and upheld him in his sufferings, and enabled the jailer to recognise his innocence and usefulness, and thus to lighten his captivity. We learn by this story of Joseph that Almighty God does not forsake those who are His, and that we ought always to trust in Him, have recourse to Him, and submit ourselves to His will. You can see now why the Church (by the mouth of her priests) says "*Dominus vobiscum*" to us so often; for these words express her wish that God may always be with us by His grace. The response: "And with thy spirit", equally expresses the wish that God may, by His grace, dwell in the soul of the priest.

Compassion. When he was set over the other prisoners, Joseph was not rough and harsh with them, but, on the contrary, sympathised with them, and comforted those who were in trouble. "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy."

Humility. Joseph at once gave it to be understood that the interpretation of the dreams must come from God, and that of himself he could give none. He thus gave the glory to God.

Ingratitude. The chief butler behaved most ungratefully towards Joseph by forgetting him in the time of his own prosperity. Was that not horrible? But to whom is it that we owe most gratitude? Is it not to God? Thanksgiving is a necessary part of the worship of God. We should not thank Him by words only, but also by deed, and by doing

His holy will. He who offends God grievously proves that he is thoroughly ungrateful.

III. Application.

You have often been ungrateful to God, and also to your parents and superiors, by vexing and grieving them. Think of all the benefits both to soul and body which you have received from God! Say your morning and night prayers, and your grace at meal-times devoutly.

The chief butler forgot Joseph who, all the time, was lingering in prison. Christians are very apt to forget their departed friends and benefactors who are suffering in the prison of purgatory. Has it been so with you? Pray every day for the holy souls, and especially for your relations and benefactors.

CHAPTER XXI.

JOSEPH'S EXALTATION.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

AFTER two years, Pharaoh had a dream. He thought he stood by the river Nile¹ out of which came seven cows, very beautiful and fat; and they fed in marshy places. After them came, also, seven others that were lean and ill-favoured, and they devoured the fat ones. Then the king awoke.

He slept again and dreamed another dream in which he saw seven ears of corn growing upon one stalk; and the ears were full and fair. After these came up seven other ears, thin and blighted, devouring all the beauty of the former. Pharaoh awoke the second time, and, morning having come, he sent for all the soothsayers² and wise men of Egypt, and related to them his dreams. But no one was found who could interpret them.

¹ This is the only river in Egypt. In map I the lower part of the river is shown; and you can see that it is divided into many branches and channels. It is to this river that Egypt owes its fertility. In the summer (from August to October) the Nile overflows its banks, and inundates the whole plain with its slimy waters. This water provides the sandy plain with necessary moisture, and the slime, left behind by the inundation, acts as a powerful manure. The crops are sown



after the annual overflow, and the ground produces corn in abundance, each stalk bearing from three to seven ears. When the Nile does not overflow, nothing grows, and there is a famine. — ² These men gave themselves out as capable of interpreting dreams and foretelling the future.

Then the chief butler remembered Joseph, and was sorry that he had so long forgotten him ³. He told the king that there was in the prison a Hebrew ⁴ youth who had interpreted dreams for him and the chief baker, and that all had come to pass just as he said.

The king's curiosity being excited, he ordered the youth to be brought before him. Then he addressed him, saying: "I have dreamed dreams, and there is no one that can expound them. Now, I have heard that thou art very wise at interpreting them." Joseph answered: "God alone can give Pharaoh a prosperous answer." Pharaoh then related what he had seen.

Having heard the dreams, Joseph said: "God hath shown to Pharaoh what He is about to do ⁵. The seven beautiful kine, and the seven full ears, are seven years of plenty;

the seven lean and thin kine, and the seven blasted ears, are seven years of famine. There shall come seven years of great plenty in the whole land of Egypt, after which shall follow seven other years of so great a scarcity that all the abundance before shall be forgotten; for the famine shall consume all the land, and the greatness of the scarcity shall destroy the greatness of the plenty. Now, therefore, let the king provide a wise and industrious man⁵ who shall gather into barns the fifth part of the fruit of the seven years of plenty, so that it be ready against the seven years of famine."

³ The duty of gratitude ought to have made him think of Joseph as soon as ever he had received his pardon. — ⁴ He called Joseph a Hebrew, because the descendants of Abraham were known by that name. — ⁵ i. e. these dreams have been sent to you by God in order to show you what is, by His divine providence, to happen in the future. — ⁶ a prudent, active man who would be capable of carrying out such a great work.

This counsel was pleasing to Pharaoh, and he said to his courtiers: "Can we find such another man that is full of the Spirit of God?"⁷ Then the king said to Joseph: "Can I find one wiser and like unto thee? Thou shalt be over my house, and at the commandment of thy mouth all the people shall obey. Only in the kingly throne will I be above thee."⁸

Then the king, having made Joseph ruler over all the land of Egypt, took his ring⁹ from his own hand, and placed it on that of Joseph. He put on him, also, a robe of silk, and a chain of gold around his neck, and caused him to be seated in a triumphal chariot next to his own, and to be proclaimed governor of Egypt.¹⁰ He also changed his name, and called him Saviour¹¹ of the world. Joseph was thirty years old¹², when he was made ruler of Egypt.

The life of Joseph teaches us clearly that the ways of God are wonderful. His brothers hated him, and this hatred of theirs brought him to Egypt; and this was the first step to his greatness. The wife of Putiphar hated him, and her hatred brought him into prison; and this was the next step to his greatness, for in prison he became acquainted with

the chief butler of the king. But, if Joseph had murmured against providence, or had cursed his enemies, God would not have placed him on the throne of Egypt.

⁷ i. e. I cannot find a more capable man than this one. He knew that the Spirit of God was with Joseph. — ⁸ Kings sit on a throne, and a throne, therefore, is the type of kingly power. The king meant: I will remain king, but next to me yours shall be the highest authority in Egypt, and you shall govern the country in my name. Joseph was, in fact, made the Prime Minister of the king. — ⁹ Pharaoh gave Joseph his signet-ring, as a sign that Joseph was empowered to give orders in the king's name, and to seal them with the king's seal. —

¹⁰ Pharaoh commanded that all men should bow the knee to Joseph, as a test whether they were ready to obey and honour him. —

¹¹ because he had saved Egypt and the neighbouring countries from the horrors of famine. — ¹² Joseph was now thirty years old. He was sixteen, when his brothers sold him: therefore, he had been a slave for fourteen years, three or four of which had been passed in prison.

II. Commentary.

Humility. When Pharaoh said to Joseph: "I have heard that thou art very wise at interpreting dreams," Joseph replied that it was God alone Who could give the interpretation. This was as much as to say: "Of myself I can do nothing; I can only interpret dreams by the inspiration of God." Thus he was humble, and gave the glory to God. "Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to Thy name give glory" (Ps. 113, 9).

The reward of virtue. Joseph had suffered for a long time, but his troubles came to an end at last, his patience and trust in God were richly rewarded, and he was fully compensated for all his past sufferings. Once, his brothers tore his clothes from his back: now, he was clad in a robe of silk. Once, he was degraded to a state of slavery: now, he was raised to the highest dignity. He was once loaded with chains in prison: now, he was distinguished by a chain of gold round his neck. He had been dragged off to prison like the worst of criminals: now, he was led through the streets in the king's chariot, and all men bowed before him. "Behold, thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord" (Ps. 127, 4).

The Wisdom of Divine Providence is clearly to be seen in this story of Joseph's abasement and exaltation. What were Almighty God's intentions about Joseph? He had signified by the dreams which Joseph had dreamt as a boy, that he would one day be a great lord, and that his brethren would bow down before him. Man did every possible thing to hinder this exaltation. His brothers sold him as a slave on account of those very dreams. The merchants took him far away; Putiphar had him cast into prison like a criminal; the chief butler, who was deeply indebted to him, forgot all about him. Humanly speaking, there was no prospect of either his freedom or his honour being restored to him; much less of his becoming a great lord. But God made everything which was apparently a misfortune and humiliation conduce to his future exaltation. By being sold, he was taken to the very land where he was to be exalted. By being put into prison, he became known to the chief butler, who, later on, introduced him to the king. Even the chief butler's ingratitude, which must have deeply wounded Joseph, led, under God's providence, towards the desired end; for if the chief butler had remembered him sooner, and got him taken out of prison at once, Joseph would not have remained in Egypt, but would have returned to Chanaan, to his sorrowful old father. Thus, all these misfortunes led, under divine providence, to the future exaltation of Joseph. Moreover, by his troubles he was confirmed in prayer, confidence, humility, and love of his neighbour, and was thus prepared for the important post for which God destined him. When we think of all this, we can only exclaim with St. Paul: "How incomprehensible are God's judgments, and how unsearchable His ways!" (Rom. 11, 33.)

Joseph, the sixth type of Jesus Christ. Joseph, the beloved, obedient, and innocent son of his father, was envied by his brethren, ill-treated by them, sold, and given over to the gentiles: so also Jesus. Joseph was repeatedly tempted, and yet did not sin: so also Jesus. Joseph was falsely accused and unjustly condemned. He suffered patiently and resignedly between two malefactors, to one of whom he

foretold pardon: Jesus, crucified between two thieves, said to the one on His right Hand: "This day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise." Joseph was set free from prison, and made ruler over the whole land: Jesus was raised from the prison of the tomb, and sitteth at the right hand of His Father. Joseph was called the Saviour of the world, because he saved the Egyptians from famine: Jesus is indeed the Saviour of the world, because He has redeemed the whole world from sin and hell. The Egyptians bowed the knee before Joseph to testify the homage they owed him. "In the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth, and every tongue shall confess that the Lord Jesus Christ is the glory of God the Father" (Phil. 2, 10. 11). (Repeat the first five types.)

Joseph's exaltation is a type of the glory of the just in heaven. God does not always reward the just in this world, for we were created, not for a temporal, but for an eternal happiness. But we may be sure that He will reward them in the next world by an "eternal weight of glory" (2 Cor. 4, 17). The just have to pass through many trials on earth. They may, like Joseph, be persecuted and ridiculed for their faith, piety, or conscientiousness, but some day they will be exalted, and rewarded with everlasting happiness. The more good a man has done on earth, and the more he has suffered for the love of God, the greater will be his reward in heaven. "Blessed are they that suffer persecution for justice's sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are ye, when they shall revile you and persecute you, and speak all that is evil against you untruly, for My sake. Be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven" (Mat. 5, 10—12). "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation, for, when he hath been proved, he shall receive the crown of life" (James 1, 12). "The sufferings of this time are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come" (Rom. 8, 18).

III. Application.

Men often take that to be a misfortune which is really the contrary. Never complain of the ways of God, but always, and in all things, submit to His holy will. Have you ever complained? Are you not cowardly and desponding under suffering? Say to yourself: "God knows what is best for me. Not my will, but Thine be done!"

CHAPTER XXII.

THE SONS OF JACOB GO INTO EGYPT.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

THE seven years of plenty came, as Joseph had foretold. There was great abundance everywhere. And Joseph gathered the surplus of the grain¹ every year, and stored it up in the granaries. But, after the years of plenty, the seven years of scarcity set in, and the famine prevailed in all the countries. The people of Egypt cried to the king for bread, but he answered them: "Go to Joseph, and do all that he shall say to you."

Joseph opened all the granaries and sold to the Egyptians. Likewise the people from other countries came to Egypt to buy corn. At last, the famine reached Chanaan, and Jacob, having heard that there was wheat in Egypt for sale, sent ten of his sons with money to buy food. But Benjamin, the youngest, he kept at home, fearing lest some evil might befall him on the way.

The ten sons of Jacob arrived safely in Egypt, and, seeing Joseph, they bowed down before him, not knowing that he was their brother². But he at once recognized them, and remembered the dreams he had dreamed³. He wished to know whether they were now sorry for their sin⁴; so he spoke to them, as if they were strangers to him, and said: "You are spies"⁵.

They answered: "It is not so, my lord, but we have come to buy food. We, thy servants, are twelve brethren, the sons of one man in the land of Chanaan. The youngest is with our father; the other is not living"⁶. Joseph then cast them into prison three days⁷.

¹ Corn, wheat &c. — ² Joseph was a boy of sixteen, when they sold him, and was now thirty-eight years old. He would have changed a great deal in appearance in twenty-two years. Besides that, they could never have dreamt that their young slave brother could have become this great ruler. — ³ the first of which was then fulfilled. — ⁴ and if they had improved. Above all things, he wished to find out if they treated his young brother Benjamin as harshly and unlovingly as they had treated him. This was why he forced them to bring Benjamin

back with them, so that he might be convinced with his own eyes that he was still alive. — ⁵ i. e. you are foreign informers, and wish to find out where this country could be most easily invaded and conquered. — ⁶ The brothers might well have hesitated and wondered what to say about Joseph. — ⁷ He did this, so that they might have time to enter into themselves, and confess the sin, which they had committed against him.

On the third day, he brought them out, and said: "If you be peaceable men, let one of your brethren be bound in prison, and go ye your ways, and carry the corn, that you have bought into your houses; and bring your youngest brother to me, that I may find your words to be true, and you may not die."

Then, they said one to another: "We deserve to suffer these things, because we have sinned against our brother, seeing the anguish of his soul, when he besought us, and we would not hear; therefore, is this affliction come upon us"⁸. They thought that Joseph did not understand them, for he spoke to them through an interpreter⁹. But he understood all that they said, and his heart was moved with pity, so that, turning aside from them, he wept¹⁰.

But in order to see, if their repentance was sincere, he returned to them and ordered Simeon¹¹ to be bound before their eyes. Then, he commanded his servants to fill their sacks with wheat, and put each man's money secretly in his sack¹², and give them, besides, provisions¹³ for their journey. This being done, they loaded their asses with the corn, and returned home.

They related to their father all that had happened, and, on opening their sacks, every man found his money tied in the mouth of his sack. Seeing this, they were troubled and afraid¹⁴. And Jacob said to them: "You have made me childless. Joseph is not living, Simeon is kept in bonds, and Benjamin ye will take away. My son shall not go down with you, for, if any evil befall him, you will bring my hairs in sorrow to the grave."

⁸ We can see by these words that they had entered into themselves in prison, and now, confessed their guilt towards Joseph. — ⁹ A man, who understood and translated both the Hebrew and Egyptian languages,

In order not to betray himself to his brethren, he spoke to them in Egyptian, and the interpreter translated what he said to his brethren. — ¹⁰ He was moved by the penitent dispositions of his brothers. We can see by Joseph's tears that his harshness to his brothers arose from no desire of revenge, but from the very best intentions. — ¹¹ Simeon was the brother next in age to Reuben. Joseph would not have Reuben bound, because he had wished to save him; therefore, he kept the next eldest as a hostage. Very likely Simeon had been the chief instigator of Joseph's ill-treatment, and, therefore, a longer captivity was necessary to bring him to repentance. — ¹² He would not take money for the bread, which was to feed his own family. — ¹³ All that was necessary for the journey. — ¹⁴ They feared, that the great Egyptian governor would take them for thieves, and would be more severe than ever with them.

II. Commentary.

Admonishing sinners. Joseph treated his brethren severely, not out of revenge, but out of love. He wished to bring them to self-examination, repentance and amendment of life. To admonish sinners, so as to convert them and lead them to see their sins, and to repent of them, is a duty of brotherly love and one of the spiritual works of mercy. St. James says (5, 20): "He who causeth a sinner to be converted from the error of his way, shall save his soul from death, and shall cover a multitude of sins."

The object of sufferings. God, in His love, inflicts temporal sufferings on sinners, so that they may thereby be saved from the eternal sufferings of hell. These sufferings, such as sicknesses, misfortunes &c., ought to have the effect of turning the sinner's thoughts to God, death, judgment and eternity, of teaching him to see the vanity of earthly things, and of leading him to repent of his sins, do penance, and care for the things of his soul. Such troubles are called visitations, for it is in this way that God visits His wandering children, and seeks to bring them back to the right way. "For, whom the Lord loveth, He chastiseth" (Hebr. 12, 6). Millions of the blessed would not now be in heaven, if God had not visited them with tribulations in this world.

The strictness of parents. Parents must punish their children sometimes, so as to keep them from evil. They do so, and must do so, out of love. Parents, who indulge their children

in everything, have no true love for them, because they spoil them. Happy the child, whose parents are strict. "He that spareth the rod, hateth his son, but he that loveth him, correcteth him betimes" (Prov. 13, 24).

Economy. Joseph practised economy in the time of plenty, in order to be able to help others in the time of need. The wise son of Sirach says: "Remember poverty in the time of abundance, and the necessities of poverty in the day of riches" (Ecclus. 18, 25).

Feeding the hungry. On one hand, we should guard against extravagance, on the other, against the detestable vice of avarice. Joseph fed the hungry Egyptians with bread: we too ought to be willing to help those in need.

A bad conscience. It was really from kindness that Joseph secretly returned their money to his brothers, and gave them provisions for their journey. But his generosity caused them no joy, only anxiety and fear, because their consciences were guilty. They feared that God meant to punish them for the crime they had committed against Joseph, and had brought it about that their money should be left in their sacks, so that they might be regarded and punished as thieves. An evil conscience spoils every joy. It fills the sinner with fear, and follows him about wherever he goes.

The treasury of Christ's Merits. Even as Pharaoh said to the hungry Egyptians: "Go to Joseph," so does the Heavenly King say to all those who are laden with sin and misery: "Go to Jesus, and do all that He tells you", even as He said at the Transfiguration: "This is my beloved Son, hear ye Him". If we obey this command, we shall be saved from death. Jesus Christ bequeathed to His Church a treasury of His superabundant merits and graces, from which we, by means of the seven Sacraments, can draw for all our needs.

St. Joseph. The Church applies those words: "Go to Joseph," to the holy foster-father of our Lord, to whom the Joseph of Egypt bore much resemblance. St. Joseph was holy, chaste, and innocent, received revelations from God, was put in charge of the Holy Family, and is now in heaven, the true guardian and protector of every child of Jesus. His powerful intercession opens to us the treasury of divine grace. He is the special patron of the holy Church. We ought to venerate St. Joseph very much, follow his virtuous example, and implore his intercession.

III. Application.

If you have any pain to bear, such as toothache &c., offer it to God, and resolve to lead a better life for the future. If you are punished by your parents, say to yourself: "It is what I deserve."

Have you not often been extravagant? Do not waste anything, and do not spend money unnecessarily, as, for instance, on sweet things. Do not purposely spoil your clothes, books &c.; and willingly give of your savings to the poor.

CHAPTER XXIII.

BENJAMIN'S JOURNEY TO EGYPT.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

BUT, after some months, the corn, which the sons of Jacob had brought from Egypt, was consumed, and the famine still continued. Therefore, Jacob said to his sons: "Go again into Egypt and bring us a little food." Juda told his father that the governor had forbidden them to come back to Egypt, unless they brought Benjamin with them. And Juda added: "Send the boy with me that we may set forward, lest both we and our children perish. I take the boy upon me; require him at my hand."¹

So Jacob consented to let Benjamin go. And he told his sons to take some of the best fruits of the country as presents to the governor of Egypt, and also to return the money, which they had found in their sacks, lest perhaps it was done by mistake. Then, he prayed that God might prosper their journey, and make the governor of Egypt favourable² to them, and send them back with Simeon and Benjamin.

¹ I will be surety for him. I will stay myself in Egypt rather than that Benjamin should not return to you. — ² favourably inclined, or kindly disposed towards them.

Then, they went down to Egypt, and stood before Joseph. When Joseph saw them, and Benjamin in their midst, he commanded his steward to conduct them to his house, and prepare a banquet³. The steward obeyed. But the brothers, on finding themselves in the governor's house, were seized

with fear, and said one to another: "Because of the money, which we carried back the first time in our sacks, we are brought in that he may bring upon us a false accusation, and by violence make slaves of us."

Therefore, they went to the steward at the door, and said: "We cannot tell, who put that money in our bags." But he said to them: "Peace be to you; fear not." And he brought Simeon out to them. Joseph, having now entered the house, they bowed down before him and offered their gifts. He kindly saluted them in return, and asked, if their aged father was still living⁴.

They told him that their father lived, and was in good health. Then Joseph, seeing Benjamin, inquired, if that was their youngest brother. They answered: "He is our youngest brother." Then Joseph said: "God be gracious to thee, my son"; and, going out, he wept, for his heart was deeply touched at the sight of his young brother⁵. Having dried his tears and washed his face⁶, he returned to his brethren and ordered food to be placed before them. Then, they were ordered to sit before him, and he placed them according to their age, the first-born first, and the youngest last. All received gifts, but Benjamin received five times more than the rest⁷. And they wondered much⁸.

³ As soon as Joseph had convinced himself that Benjamin was alive, he resolved to receive his brothers cordially, and have a feast prepared. — ⁴ How beautiful and touching it is that Joseph's first thought should be to ask after his father. — ⁵ Benjamin had been quite a little child, when Joseph was sold. — ⁶ so that they might not see that he had been weeping. — ⁷ By doing this, Joseph not only wished to distinguish and favour his young brother, but he also wished to see, if his brothers envied Benjamin, as they had envied him. — ⁸ They could not understand, how this Egyptian governor could know, which was eldest &c. With the exception of Benjamin, they were all grown men of over forty, and, at that time of life, it is not easy to judge the difference of age.

II. Commentary.

God rules over everything, even the hearts of men. For this reason Jacob said, when he sent his sons back to Egypt: "May my Almighty God make the man favourable to you."

God governs the hearts of men by His grace. "As the division of the waters, so is the heart of the king in the hand of the Lord. Whithersoever He will, He shall turn it" (Prov. 21, 1).

Love for parents. The first thing Joseph did was to ask after his father. While he was at home, Joseph had loved, honoured and obeyed him, and been a joy to him; and now, though he had become so distinguished, rich and powerful, he still loved his father dearly, and was most anxious for news of his welfare. He thus observed the Fourth Commandment.

Love for brothers and sisters. Joseph sincerely loved his brothers. He meant well by them, and was severe to them only for the purpose of doing them good. As soon as he was sure that Benjamin had suffered no harm from them, he was kind to them. He did not return evil for evil, but rather good for evil. They had sold him for money, and he, in return, gave them plenty of corn. They had thrown him into a pit and nearly starved him: he took them into his house, and feasted them royally. They had treated him as a rogue and a slave: he had them waited on like princes. They remained unmoved, when he prayed for mercy: he was so moved by the sight of them and their anxieties that he could not restrain his tears. Is he not a noble and beautiful character? Would that all brothers and sisters loved each other like that!

Restitution. Jacob bade his sons take back with them the money, which they had found in their sacks; the reason, which he gave, being that it might have been put there by mistake. Jacob was, we can see by this, upright and conscientious, and wished to restore what he had found to its owner. "If", said he to himself, "this Egyptian governor refuses to take money for the corn, and has had the money returned in the sacks on purpose, then, we can keep it with a clear conscience; but if it has been given back by mistake, I will, any how, return it, and then, my conscience cannot reproach me."

III. Application.

How do you behave to your brothers and sisters? Do you provoke or strike them? And are you angry and

revengeful, when they have injured you? Do you often quarrel with them? Where, then, is your love for them? You ought to love all your neighbours; and surely your brothers and sisters are nearer to you than any one else, and you ought to love them more than any one else.

Do you really love your parents? Do you ever vex or grieve them? You will have neither happiness nor blessing in life, if you do not honour your parents.

Have you kept anything, which does not belong to you? Have you always restored anything you have found to its owner, or returned the money, when too much change has been given to you &c.

CHAPTER XXIV.

JOSEPH'S SILVER CUP.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

JOSEPH showed this preference for Benjamin, in order to see, if his brothers had overcome their former envious feelings. He wished to know, also, whether they really loved their youngest brother, or whether they would sacrifice him, also, to a spirit of jealousy¹.

Hence, he commanded the steward to fill their sacks with corn, and to put each one's money in the top of his sack; but to place in the mouth of Benjamin's sack Joseph's own silver cup. This was done, and the brothers set out on their journey.

But they had scarcely gone forward a little way, when Joseph sent his steward after them, who, overtaking them, accused them of stealing his master's cup. He said: "Why have ye returned evil for good?"² Struck with terror, and angry at being suspected of theft, the brothers replied: "With whomsoever the cup shall be found, let him die³, and we will be the bondsmen of my lord." The steward replied: "Be it according to your words."

They immediately took down their sacks and opened them, and when the steward had searched them all, beginning with that of the eldest, he found the cup in Benjamin's sack.

The brothers, rending their garments⁴, loaded their asses again and returned to the city⁵.

¹ Joseph could see that his brothers had improved. Benjamin was alive, so it was plain that they had not put him out of the way. Also their words: "We deserve to suffer these things", bore witness to the change for the better in them. But he still wished to see if they had *completely* changed. It was true that Benjamin was alive, but, all the same, they might envy and hate him, and this he wished to put to the proof, by placing Benjamin in what was apparently a very dangerous position, and seeing if they would forsake him. —

² Why have you thus repaid the hospitality of my master? — ³ This they said, each feeling quite certain that no one of the others was capable of such an act. — ⁴ with grief. — ⁵ i. e. the city, where Joseph dwelt. With what feelings of fear, grief and repentance must they have returned!

And, falling down before Joseph⁶, they said: "Behold, we are all bondmen to my lord"⁷. But Joseph answered: "God forbid! He that stole the cup, he shall be my bondman, and go you away free to your father."

Then, Juda told Joseph, how much it had cost their father to part with Benjamin. They would rather die, all of them, he said, than return to their aged father without his youngest son. Juda, moreover, offered to remain, and be the governor's slave till death, if he would allow Benjamin to go back safe to his father⁸. This proposal showed, how sincere was the repentance of the sons of Jacob for their former crime.

⁶ When, on other occasions, they had come into Joseph's presence, they had bowed down to the ground before him, but this time, they prostrated themselves, for they felt that everything depended on propitiating this great man. — ⁷ When first accused, they had said: "With whomsoever the cup shall be found, let him die". But Juda makes no mention of this now. Once it is a question of Benjamin, they would all prefer being slaves, rather than that he should perish. — ⁸ Juda's conduct was very noble. He was quite ready to give himself to be a slave, in Benjamin's stead, so as to spare to his father the sorrow of the boy's loss. It was no longer possible for Joseph to doubt the change in his brothers' dispositions.

II. Commentary.

Sin is an ingratitude to God. Almighty God might well say to us, what the steward said to Joseph's brethren: "Why have you returned evil for good? I have done good to you;

I have given you life and health and grace, and you have repaid my bounties with ingratitude. You have done a very evil thing each time you have sinned." Mortal sin, especially, is a base act of ingratitude towards God, our Father.

Love for our parents, and brothers and sisters. Juda had, evidently, a very sincere love both for his father and for his brother Benjamin. Children should show their love for their parents by never annoying or grieving them, and by helping them in their necessities. And, in the same way, brothers and sisters ought to love one another.

III. Application.

In order to spare his old father grief, Juda offered to be a slave, instead of Benjamin, for the rest of his life. Have you never caused sorrow to your parents? Repent of this, and take every pains to be a joy to them by your obedience, diligence &c. "Son, grieve not thy father" (Ecclus. 3, 14).

Juda adopted Benjamin and protected him. You ought to take up the cause of your younger brothers and sisters, and help them to pray and learn, to keep from evil, and love what is good. But are you not, on the contrary, cross with them, and do you not, sometimes, encourage them to do wrong?

CHAPTER XXV.

JOSEPH MAKES HIMSELF KNOWN TO HIS BRETHREN.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

JOSEPH could no longer restrain himself, and, therefore, he commanded his officers and servants to retire¹. Then, with tears and sobs², he said: "I am Joseph. Is my father yet living?"³ His brothers could not answer him, being struck with exceeding great fear⁴. But Joseph said mildly to them: "Come nearer to me. I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. Fear nothing, for God sent me before you into Egypt for your preservation"⁵.

Then he said: "Make haste, and go ye up to my father, and say to him: 'Thus saith thy son Joseph: Come down to me; linger not; and thou shalt dwell in the land of Gessen;



and thou shalt be near me, thou and thy sons.'” Then, falling upon the neck of Benjamin, he wept, and Benjamin wept also in like manner. Then, he embraced all his brethren, and wept over them, after which they were emboldened to speak to him.

The news went abroad in the king’s court: The brethren of Joseph are come. And Pharaoh, with all his family, was glad. He told Joseph to invite his father and his brethren to come to Egypt. Joseph gave his brothers chariots and provisions for the way. He ordered two robes to be given to each of them, but to Benjamin he gave five robes of the best, with three hundred pieces of silver. Besides, he gave them rich presents for their father, and warned them not to be angry on the way ⁶.

¹ They were all Egyptians. He wished to talk undisturbed with his brothers, and also did not wish to make known their guilt to others. — ² His heart was so moved that he had to weep, before he could utter a word. — ³ How he loved his father! He asked repeatedly after him, in order to hear over and over again the glad news that he was still alive. — ⁴ Their guilty consciences made them fear

that Joseph would now revenge himself on them. — ⁵ He meant: It was by God's providence that I came here, and became governor over Egypt, in order to save you and the Egyptians from starvation. He wished to comfort them and find excuses for them, and thus give them courage. — ⁶ He feared that they might begin to reproach one another, and each one make out that the others had had the greater share in the cruelty, practised on Joseph. On this account, he admonished them to keep the peace.

II. Commentary.

Providence. "Not by your counsel was I sent hither, but by the will of God", said Joseph to his brothers. He understood that it was by God's permission that he was sold by them. It was, indeed, a great crime, which the brothers committed. It was not by God's will that the evil was done, because He, being holy, can will no evil; but He permitted it, and so guided matters that good came out of evil. The good, that came out of it, was threefold. Firstly, Joseph's virtue was tried and strengthened, and subsequently rewarded by his exaltation. Secondly, his own relatives and all the Egyptians were saved from starvation. Thirdly, his brothers were converted.

Forgiveness of others. Just think, how cruelly his brothers had behaved to this innocent Joseph. Being the powerful governor of Egypt, he could easily have had them cast into prison or killed, or he could have kept them as his slaves. Instead of this, he freely forgave them. He did not even reproach them, but, on the contrary, made excuses for them, and loaded them with presents. Was not that beautiful and magnanimous!

Joseph as a type of Jesus Christ. We saw in Chapt. XXI in how many ways Joseph is a type of our Blessed Lord. In this present chapter we can see a still further resemblance in him to the Divine Saviour. As Joseph forgave and excused his brethren, so did our Lord, hanging on the Cross, forgive His enemies, and pray for them: "Father, forgive them, for they know not, what they do!"

The terror of sinners at the Last Judgment. When Joseph said to his brethren: "I am Joseph!" they were so full of fear that they could not speak. How much greater will be the fear of sinners at

the Last Judgment, when Jesus appears in power and majesty, and says: "I am Jesus, Whom you have persecuted, and injured and crucified by your sins!"

III. Application.

Joseph's example teaches us that we should from our hearts forgive those who have injured us, and return with good the evil they have done to us. The love of our enemies is, therefore, a beautiful and great virtue, which we Christians are bound to practise.

Brothers and sisters ought to love each other. Joseph's exhortation to his brethren: "Be not angry in the way", applies especially to them.

CHAPTER XXVI.

JACOB GOES INTO EGYPT.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

WHEN Joseph's brethren returned to their father, they told him: "Joseph, thy son, is living, and he is ruler in all the land of Egypt." But Jacob did not believe them, till they showed him the chariots and all the presents, that Joseph had sent. Then he awoke, as it were, from a deep sleep¹; his spirit revived², and he said: "It is enough for me, if Joseph, my son, be yet living³. I will go and see him, before I die."

And he set out for Egypt, with his whole family⁴ and all his possessions. When he had reached the confines of Chanaan, he offered a sacrifice to God⁵, Who spoke to him in a vision of the night, saying: "Fear not, go down into Egypt, for I will make a great nation of thee there, and will bring thee back again from hence." Consoled by the vision, Jacob continued his journey, and arrived in Egypt.

¹ When a person dreams something terrible and alarming, and then wakes up, and finds that there is no real cause for fear, he feels relieved and consoled. Jacob had hitherto mourned for his son Joseph, as for one dead — and now, he heard that he was alive! His former grief was like a terrible dream of the past, and it was, as if a heavy load were removed from his heart. However, it seemed so wonderful that Joseph, whose blood-stained coat he had seen with his own eyes

should be alive, and a great ruler in Egypt, that he could not believe it to be true, until he saw the waggons and costly gifts he had sent. — ² His spirit, knocked down and crushed by grief, recovered itself, and he felt happy. — ³ It is quite enough for me to know that my son is alive. That he is rich and powerful is quite a secondary consideration. I do not want anything in this world, except to see him once more. — ⁴ Jacob's sons were nearly all married, and had children. In all, Jacob's family, without counting the wives, amounted to seventy persons. — ⁵ Jacob found himself on the point of again leaving the land, which God had promised to give to him and his descendants, and of going with all his family into a strange country. Very likely, the doubt arose in his mind, whether he were doing right. He desired that Almighty God would make known His will to him, and he wished, in case he were acting rightly, to ask the Lord's gracious protection for his journey. God heard Jacob's prayer, and gave him a threefold assurance: firstly, that he might without fear proceed on his way; secondly, that his descendants would become a great people in Egypt; and thirdly, that God would bring this people back to Chanaan.

Juda went on in advance, to apprise Joseph of his father's approach. Joseph immediately made ready his chariot, and went up to meet his father. As soon as he saw him coming, he descended from his chariot and embraced him, weeping.

And Jacob said to Joseph: "Now I shall die with joy, because I have seen thy face, and leave thee alive." Joseph presented his father to Pharaoh, who asked him: "How many are the years of thy life?" Jacob answered: "The days of my pilgrimage⁶ are a hundred and thirty years, few⁷ and evil⁸, and they are not come up to the days of the pilgrimage of my fathers." Then Jacob, having blessed the king, retired. And Joseph gave his father and his brothers possessions in the land of Gessen⁹, the most beautiful and fertile part of Egypt.

⁶ i. e. my life. — ⁷ in comparison with those of his fathers. Abraham lived to be 175, Isaac 180, and Noe 950 years old. — ⁸ He called his days evil, because he had had so much trouble in his life. — ⁹ the north-east part of Egypt (see map).

II. Commentary.

The love of parents for their children. You can see by the example of Jacob, how very strong is the love, which parents have for their children. He had mourned for Joseph for twenty-three long years, and the moment he heard that he

was alive, he, full of fatherly love, cried out that he asked for nothing more on earth than to see his son Joseph once more. Then, too, how troubled he was about the prisoner Simeon, and how anxiously careful of Benjamin! He proved his love for Joseph by his actions, for out of love for him he left his home, notwithstanding his infirmities, and undertook a long and difficult journey. Parents are only too willing to do all that they can for their children.

Love and respect for parents. This story shows to us the love and respect, which Joseph had for his father. Joseph acted as he did, although his father was a shepherd, and shepherds were despised in Egypt. Moreover, by reason of the famine, Jacob had become poor. Joseph, however, was not ashamed of the humble and poor condition of his father, but showed him every open mark of respect, that he could.

Respect for old age. King Pharaoh paid respect to Jacob, not only because he was Joseph's father, but because of his old age. We should always respect old age. "Rise up before the hoary head, and honour the person of the aged man" (Lev. 19, 32).

Prayer for light. Jacob prayed and offered up a sacrifice, in order to learn God's will. If we are in doubt, we should seek counsel not only from our parents, confessor &c., but we should pray to the Holy Ghost for light.

Consolation in suffering. Once both Jacob and Joseph wept for sorrow; now they wept for joy. After the rain, comes sunshine, and after sorrow, comes joy, often in this world, but most certainly in the next, if the sufferings are borne with patience and resignation. "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes: and death shall be no more, nor mourning nor crying" (Apoc. 21, 4).

Life is a pilgrimage. God's servants know that they are strangers and pilgrims on earth. "The years of my pilgrimage have been few and evil", said old Jacob. His life had, indeed, been one of unrest, pain, and danger. He had had to leave his home, when he was quite young, and live for many years in exile and servitude. After his return home, there fell on him the heavy blow of Joseph's loss. Then, came the great

famine; and now, towards the end of his life, he found himself once more in a strange country, far from the Promised Land. He looked back sadly on his years of pilgrimage, and told the king that they had been evil. But, at the same time, he looked onward to that better and imperishable home, which is the aim and end of our earthly pilgrimage. Comparing his life in this world with that which is eternal, he said that his long years of pilgrimage had been few. "For we have not here a lasting city" (Hebr. 13, 14); we are but pilgrims on the road to eternity. Heaven is our home. We should not, therefore, cling to the things of this earth, but should, above all things, seek the kingdom of God. St. Peter writes: "I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims, to refrain yourselves from carnal desires" (1 Pet. 2, 11).

God's Wisdom, shown by His guidance of the Israelites. Why did Almighty God's wise providence send Jacob and his family into Egypt? In order that Jacob's descendants, His chosen people, should not be led into idolatry. The danger of this would have been very great in Chanaan, where they lived, surrounded by idolaters. Esau had already made himself one with the children of Heth. Had Jacob's descendants remained in Chanaan, they would have either got scattered among the heathen, or they would have died out. They could not have developed into an independent nation. In Egypt it was different. The Israelites lived in a district of their own, cut off from and despised by the Egyptians, on account of their being shepherds: thus, the danger of falling away from the true God was less. Besides this, God knew that His chosen people would be purified by their long course of servitude and suffering, and would be, as it were, forced by want and persecution, to place all their confidence in God, and look to Him as their only Helper and Saviour. Lastly, Jacob's descendants would learn much that was valuable from the Egyptians, these being far ahead of the Chanaanites in agriculture, the arts, and all social laws and institutions. By this means, the Israelites would be educated for their high vocation.

III. Application.

Say the first words of the Our Father: "Our Father Who art in heaven", with great devotion. Excite in yourself a longing for heaven, and say: "Thy kingdom come." To win heaven is the most important business of our lives.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE LAST WORDS OF JACOB.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

JACOB lived seventeen years in Gessen. When the day of his end approached, Joseph, with his two sons, Ephraim and Manasses, went to visit him. Jacob kissed the boys, blessed them, and prayed that the angel, who had delivered him from evil, during life, might protect the sons of Joseph¹. To Joseph he said: "Behold, I die, and God will be with you, and bring you back into the land of your fathers."

Then, his children and grandchildren having assembled round his couch, he blessed them all. To Juda² he gave a special blessing. "Juda," said he, "thy hand shall be on the neck of thy enemies. The sons of thy father³ shall bow down to thee, and the sceptre⁴ shall not be taken away from Juda, till He come that is to be sent⁵, and He shall be the expectation of nations."⁶

Then, having told them to bury him with his fathers in the land of Chanaan, he died.

¹ "Thy two sons shall be mine," Jacob said to Joseph, "and shall inherit with mine". What should they inherit? Joseph was much richer than his father, and neither he nor his sons required that which Jacob possessed in Gessen. The inheritance, which he meant, was that which God had promised to his descendants, namely the Promised Land. Of this land the two sons of Joseph were to have equal shares with the eleven brothers of their father, and thus Joseph was to have a double portion. In chapter XLV you will learn, how punctually these last wishes of Jacob were carried out. — ² who was next eldest to Joseph. — ³ Thy brothers will be subject to thee, i. e. the tribe of Juda will be the dominant tribe of the twelve. — ⁴ The sceptre, next to the crown, is the sign of royalty. — ⁵ i. e. the royal dignity will last in Juda, until the Redeemer comes. Reuben, by an evil deed, had made himself unworthy of his birthright; hence, the double portion went to Joseph, and the rulership to Juda. — ⁶ expected with longing. As they were the heirs of the promises, God inspired the patriarchs, Noe, Isaac and Jacob, in the making of their last testaments, and they foretold the will of God, as if it were their own. The blessings they gave, and the arrangements they made, were in reality prophecies about the future destiny of the people of God.

When Joseph saw this, he fell upon his father's face, weeping and kissing him. He, then, ordered the body to be embalmed⁷. And Pharaoh commanded that all Egypt should mourn Jacob for seventy days. When the time of mourning was passed, Joseph, accompanied by all the ancients of the house of Pharaoh, set out for the land of Chanaan, and buried the remains of his father at Hebron⁸. Now, Jacob, being dead, the brothers feared that Joseph would remember the wrong they had done him, and, therefore, they came to him and begged forgiveness. Joseph received them kindly, saying: "You thought⁹ evil against me, but God turned it into good."¹⁰

Joseph lived one hundred and ten years, and saw his children's children to the third generation. When his end drew near, he said¹¹ to his brethren: "God will visit¹² you after my death, and will make you go up out of this land, to the land, which he swore to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Carry my bones with you out of this place."¹³ He then died, and they embalmed him and laid him in a coffin.

The words of Jacob to his son Juda refer to the Saviour, who was expected by the nations, and who was descended from Juda. The patriarch Joseph is a figure of St. Joseph, the foster-father of Christ. The one was ruler in Egypt; the other is the protector of the Catholic Church.

⁷ This was a custom among the Egyptians. Balm and sweet smelling drugs were introduced into the body, and the limbs tightly bandaged up. By this means the body was preserved from corruption. — ⁸ in the double cave, where Abraham, Sara, Isaac and Rebecca were already buried. — ⁹ Your intention was to do evil. — ¹⁰ i. e. but in the hands of God, what was evil turned into good. — ¹¹ filled with a prophetic spirit. — ¹² with sufferings and persecutions. — ¹³ The splendour of Egypt had not made Joseph forget the Promised Land. He always looked on it as his country, and wished to have his body buried there.

II. Commentary.

The fifth promise of the Messias. Jacob's dying prophecy treated, firstly, of Juda's precedence over his brethren, and, secondly, of the coming of the Redeemer. Both prophecies have been fulfilled. Even in the time of Moses, the tribe of Juda was the most numerous of the twelve. To this tribe belonged the royal race of David; and with it remained the

capital, Jerusalem, with the Temple and the High Priest. After the Babylonian captivity, this tribe gave its name to the whole nation, all its people being thenceforward known by the name of Jews. Finally, from the tribe of Juda sprang the Messias (Hebr. 7, 14), to whom the second part of Jacob's prophecy refers. In this wonderful prophecy, uttered 1900 years B. C., the very time of our Lord's coming was foretold, namely, that in which the dominion of Juda should cease. This came to pass exactly as foretold, for, at the time of our Lord's birth, the foreigner, Herod, placed as king over the subjected people, ruled in Judea. Jacob also prophesied that the Redeemer would be expected of all nations, i. e. that not only the children of Abraham, but all the nations would be looking for Him. This also came to pass.

Conduct towards aged parents. Joseph had always been a good son, and he honoured and loved his father as long as he was alive, and faithfully carried out his last wishes. His example shows us that we ought to support our parents in their old age; to visit and comfort them, when they are sick; to be by their side at the hour of death; to faithfully carry out their last wishes; to pray diligently for the repose of their souls, and always have a grateful remembrance of them. "Son, support the old age of thy father, and grieve him not in thy life" (Ecclus. 3, 14).

The reward of virtue. Almighty God often visibly rewards virtue, and especially that which is shown by children to their parents. We can see this in the case both of Joseph and of Juda. a) Joseph loved and honoured his father; therefore, he was blessed by God even in this world. He lived fifty-four years after his father's death, rejoiced in his children and grandchildren, was protected and enlightened by God, and died a happy death. b) Next to Joseph, Juda was the best of Jacob's sons. He saved Joseph from death, saying: "It is better he be sold than that our hands be defiled, for he is our brother." He made himself surety for Benjamin, and when Joseph wished to keep the latter as a slave, he said: "I will stay, instead of the boy, for, if he is not with us, we shall bring our father's grey hairs with sorrow to

the grave." Juda was rewarded for this generous conduct, for his tribe was the dominant one, and of it was born the Saviour. "Honour thy father in work and word and all patience. The father's blessing establisheth the houses of children: but the mother's curse rooteth up the foundation" (Ecclus. 3, 9. 11).

Happy death. Is not Jacob's death striking and beautiful? Surrounded by his children, he gives his blessing to each one, foretelling God's will concerning him. Dying in a strange land, he fixes his mind on the divine promises, and leaves this world calm and joyous, solemnly proclaiming his belief in the coming Redeemer. Joseph, too, died a holy and happy death, mourned by his brothers, children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He died firm in the hope that his people would possess the Promised Land, and that, some day, the Redeemer would come. Both Jacob and Joseph had led holy, God-fearing lives; therefore, they both died happy, peaceful deaths, firm in the hope of the future Saviour. As they lived, so they died. "With him that feareth the Lord, it shall go well in the latter end, and in the day of his death he shall be blessed" (Ecclus. 1, 13).

The twelve sons of Jacob were a type of the twelve Apostles. As from Jacob's twelve sons sprang the whole chosen people, even so, in a spiritual way, have the chosen people of the New Testament, the faithful, sprung from the twelve apostles, who converted both Jews and Gentiles, receiving them into the Church of Christ.

III. Application.

If you wish to die a happy death, you must fear God from your youth upward, and pray diligently for the grace of final perseverance, because this most important of all graces can only be obtained by prayer. Only the foolish and cowardly hope for a sudden death. The Church teaches us to pray: "From sudden and unprovided death, Lord, deliver us." It is a great blessing *not* to die suddenly, but to watch death approaching as Jacob did, and be able to prepare ourselves for it. "Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now, and at the hour of our death."

Some day you will stand by the death-bed of your father

or mother. How you will then grieve, if you have caused them sorrow or suffering in their life-time!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

JOB'S PATIENCE.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

IN the time of the patriarchs¹, there lived in Arabia² a man, whom God wished to give to all mankind, and for all time, as a perfect model of patience. This man's name was Job. He had seven sons and three daughters. He owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen, five hundred she-asses, and had a great number of servants³.

On this account, and still more, because of his singular piety, he was held in high esteem among the people of the East. One day the Lord said to Satan: "Hast thou considered my servant Job that there is none like him in earth?" Satan, answering, said: "Doth Job fear God in vain? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his possession hath increased on the earth. But stretch forth Thy hand, and take away his possessions, then, Thou shalt see that he will murmur against Thy providence."

Then, the Lord said to Satan: "All that he hath is in thy hand; only put not forth thy hand upon his person." So it came to pass upon one occasion, when the sons and daughters of Job were feasting in the house of their eldest brother, a messenger came to Job, exclaiming: "The oxen were ploughing, and the asses feeding beside them, and the Sabeans rushed in and took all away, and slew the servants with the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell thee."

While he was yet speaking⁴, another messenger came to tell Job that fire fell from heaven, which struck the sheep and the shepherds, and that he alone had escaped. Whilst he was yet speaking, there came a third messenger, who announced to Job that the Chaldeans had taken away his camels, and slain the servants all but himself.

Then came a fourth messenger, who, entering in, said to Job: "Whilst thy sons and daughters were eating and drinking in the house of their elder brother, a violent wind came on a sudden from the side of the desert, and shook the four corners of the house, and it fell ⁵, and crushed thy children, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell thee."

Then, Job rose up and rent his garments ⁶, and, having shaved his head, fell down upon the ground and worshipped, saying: "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away. As it has pleased the Lord, so is it done. Blessed be the name of the Lord." In all these things Job sinned not by his lips, nor spoke he any foolish thing against God.

¹ This was the name, given to the founders of the people of Israel, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his twelve sons. Job lived during the time of the later patriarchs, after the death of Jacob. — ² South-east of the Dead Sea (see map). — ³ shepherds, men-servants and maid-servants. — ⁴ Thus quickly did the disasters follow, one after the other. — ⁵ The beams gave way, and the stones fell, crushing and burying the children of Job. — ⁶ He did not murmur, but fell on the ground and adored.

And the Lord said to Satan: "Hast thou considered my servant Job that there is none like him in the earth?" Satan replied: "All that a man hath will he give for his life; but put forth Thy hand, touch his bone and his flesh ⁷, and then, Thou shalt see, if he will not curse Thee."

The Lord said: "Behold, he is in thy hand, but yet save his life." So Satan struck Job with a most grievous ulcer ⁸ from the sole of the foot even to the top of his head. And Job sat on a dung-hill and scraped the ulcerated matter with a potsherd. Then his wife ⁹ came, not to comfort, but rather to tempt him, for she mockingly said: "Bless God and die!" ¹⁰

But Job said to her: "Thou hast spoken like one of the foolish women. If we have received good things at the hand of God, why should we not receive evil?" Again, in all these things Job did not sin with his lips or his heart.

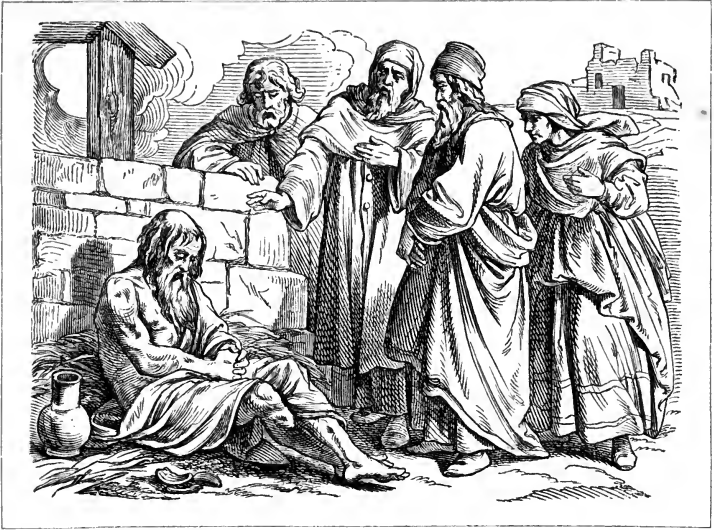
⁷ To attack Job's health and threaten his life. — ⁸ He sickened suddenly with leprosy, a loathsome and painful disease. His body was

covered with ulcers, and all men shunned him, on account of the horror and contagion of his disease. — ⁹ Job's wife was so prostrated and embittered by the loss of her children, that she got to doubt God's mercy and justice. All her happiness was destroyed, all her children were taken from her, so what good, said she, was the thought of God to her! The sight of her husband's patience was more than she could understand, or put up with. By giving way to such feelings, she was obeying the suggestions of the devil. — ¹⁰ She meant to say: "What have you gained by all your piety? Nothing remains for you but to die a miserable death. Therefore, leave God! Why should you cling to Him who has rewarded your services in such a way!"

Now, when Job's three friends heard of the evils that had befallen him, they came to visit him. When they saw him afar off, they knew him not, and, crying out, they wept, and rending their garments, they sprinkled ashes on their heads ¹¹. They sat with him on the ground seven days and seven nights, and no man spoke to him a word; for they saw that his grief was very great.

But, when Job began at length to complain of the excess of his misery, they reproached him, saying that secretly he must have been a great sinner, or the just God would not have afflicted him in so grievous a manner. But Job loudly and firmly asserted his innocence, and consoled himself with the hope of the resurrection of the body, saying: "I know that my Redeemer liveth; and, in the last day, I shall rise out of the earth; and I shall be clothed again with my skin, and in my flesh ¹² I shall see my God, whom I myself shall see and not another. This my hope is laid up in my bosom."

When they had finished their reproaches, the Lord revealed Himself in a whirlwind to Job, and mildly reprovved him, because, in defending his innocence, he had spoken some imprudent words. God's wrath, however, was kindled against the three friends, and He commanded them to offer a holocaust for themselves, whilst Job should pray for them. And the Lord looked graciously on Job's humility ¹³, and granted his prayers in behalf of his friends. The Lord rewarded Job's faith and patience, by healing his body and restoring to him



double, what he had lost. And new sons and daughters were born to him.

Job, practising virtue while happy and wealthy, was admired by the angels, but he was not yet feared by the devils; but, when he remained free from sin even in the depths of misery and affliction, then, the devils began to tremble before him. By this we learn that wrong, patiently endured for God's sake, is the highest virtue. The friends of Job knew not that God sends afflictions even to His saints, to make them more holy, and give them greater glory in heaven. Job also said that he would not live to see the Saviour promised to Adam, to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, but that he would see Him on the day of the general resurrection. From Job we may, also, learn, how pleasing to God, and how powerful, is the intercession of the saints.

¹¹ As a sign of their horror, they threw ashes into the air, so that they fell back on their heads. When they began to shower reproaches on him, he had literally no human consolation left. Nothing remained to him but the hope of the future Saviour, and of the resurrection of the body. — ¹² or my body. — ¹³ and contrition for the imprudent words, for which God rebuked him.

II. Commentary.

The sufferings of the just. The chief lesson, taught by the history of holy Job, is that God does not send sufferings only for the punishment and conversion of sinners, but also as visitations to the just, for the purpose, firstly, of cleansing them from their small faults and imperfections; secondly, of confirming them in the virtues of confidence, patience, humility &c.; thirdly, of enabling them to merit more, and, therefore, to receive a higher reward in heaven; and lastly, of making them shining examples for the imitation of their fellow men.

All things come from God. Job, first, lost all his flocks and servants, then, all his children, and lastly, his health. He did not complain; all he said was: "The Lord gave; the Lord taketh away; blessed be the name of the Lord!" But was it God, Who took all these things from him? Had not our enemy, the devil, despoiled Job, and brought about all the disasters, that we hear of? But Job believed and knew that nothing happens by chance, and that everything must take place by the guidance or permission of God, so that, in that sense, it was God, Who had taken away all that he had. Believing firmly that God had sent him his sufferings, he resigned himself entirely to His holy will, and praised Him in the midst of his tribulations.

Patience in suffering is the work of faith. The trial of holy Job was, indeed, a severe one. By almost one blow he was made poor, childless, and a leper! Forsaken by all, tortured with pain, taunted and tempted by his wife, who ought to have consoled him, he sat on a dunghheap, a very man of sorrows, with nothing to look forward to but a painful death. Even the arrival of his faithful friends did not lighten his burden, for they heaped on him reproaches for having brought these sufferings on himself by some secret sin. He fully realized what he suffered, and made it known to his friends by his sad complaints. He was not callous to his torments, but bore them with exemplary patience, without a murmur against Almighty God. From whence did Job draw

these powers of heroic endurance? In a word, from his strong, living faith. He looked forward to nothing in this world except to a grave, in which to lay his diseased body; but this made him believe all the more firmly in the promised Saviour and in the future life. He knew and proclaimed that his Redeemer was living. Job could not know this, as he had never seen Him; but all the same he believed it, and also that God Himself Who is eternal, would come as our Saviour. He believed, secondly, that he himself would rise from the earth, and with his risen body would see God in heaven.

Resentment against Almighty God. Job's wife sinned grievously against the love of God. She loved her children more than she loved God, and could not resign herself to His having taken them all from her. She listened to the suggestions of Satan, and allowed herself to murmur against the ways of God, and even against God Himself. She also sinned against the love of her neighbour; for by her bitter scorn she tried to move her husband to renounce the service of God, as being that of an unjust Master.

Rash judgment. Job's friends also sinned. It was kind of them to visit Job in his misery, but they judged their friend uncharitably and without cause, reproaching him with having some secret sin on his conscience, without which God would not have visited him with these tribulations.

The invocation of Saints. God was angry with these three friends, and bade them offer sacrifice and ask Job to intercede for them. Thus, we can see that it is right and pleasing to God to ask for the intercession of the saints; and we can also see that their intercession is efficacious, for God pardoned Job's friends because he prayed for them.

Satan's power is limited. We see by the story of Job that *Satan can injure us, only so far as God allows it.* Under the Old Law the devil had more power over men than he has now, for under the New Law Jesus Christ has crushed the head of the devil, and the suggestions of the evil enemy can hurt no one who clings to our Lord. Therefore, in her exorcisms, and in the blessing of creatures (as for instance of water), the Church prays our Divine Saviour to protect us against the attacks of Satan.

Job, the seventh type of Jesus Christ. Job, suffering the most profound grief of soul, seeing nothing but a miserable death before him, and robbed of all human consolation, fell down on the ground, praying and humbly resigning himself to God's will. In this he is a type of our Lord in the Garden of Gethsemani.

III. Application.

Job was not a Christian, and was unable to picture to himself the sufferings of God made Man; yet, how patient and resigned he was in the midst of his great trials! But you are a Christian, and in spite of being so you are often impatient, and incessantly complain and bemoan yourself when anything goes wrong. Resolve for the future to look on all troubles as visitations from God; offer them up to God, and bear them patiently, resigning yourself entirely to God's will. In all times of adversity you should, like Job, praise God, and say with our Lord: "Father, not my will, but Thine be done!"

THE AGE OF MOSES.

From the year 1500 — 1450 B. C.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE BIRTH OF MOSES.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

GOD had made two promises to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: first, that they should be the fathers of a great nation; second, that the Saviour would be a descendant of theirs. The first promise was now fulfilled. In the space of two hundred years the descendants of Jacob in Egypt had become a great people. In the meantime a new king had arisen¹, who said to the Egyptians: "Behold, the children of Israel² are stronger than we. Come, let us oppress them, lest they join with our enemies and depart out of the land."

Now, the Egyptians hated the children of Israel, and mocked them and made their life bitter with hard works in



brick and clay. And the king placed overseers³ over them, to oppress them with labour. But the more they were oppressed, the more numerous they became. The king, seeing this, issued a decree that all the male children, born of Hebrew parents, should be cast into the river⁴; hoping, by this means, either to destroy the Hebrew people, or, at least, to prevent their increasing in number.

Now, it came to pass that a Hebrew mother bore a son, and, seeing that he was very beautiful, she hid him for three months. At the end of that time, not being able to keep him any longer⁵, she laid the babe in a basket of reeds and placed it in the sedges⁶ by the river's bank. The sister of the child stood a little way off, to see what would happen.

¹ "Who knew not Joseph", and did not care to remember the services he had rendered to Egypt. — ² They took this name from Jacob's second name, Israel. — ³ or task-masters, thus called because they forced the Israelites to labour, and make great houses, dams, canals and monuments. — ⁴ the Nile. — ⁵ The king had given orders that the houses of the Israelites should be searched from time to time. — ⁶ or bulrushes. She did this in order that the floating basket might not be carried down the river by the current.

And behold, at that time the daughter of Pharaoh went down to bathe in the Nile. Seeing the basket amongst the bulrushes by the river-bank, the princess sent one of her maids to bring it to her. On opening it, they saw within it a lovely infant, crying piteously. She had compassion on it, and said: "This is one of the babes of the Hebrews." The child's sister⁷ then, taking courage, drew near and asked: "Shall I go and call to thee a Hebrew woman to nurse the babe?" She answered: "Go!" The maid went and called her mother.

+ ^When the mother came, the princess said to her: "Take this child and nurse him for me, and I will give thee wages." The woman then took the child and nursed him. And when he was grown up, he was brought to Pharaoh's daughter, who adopted him as her own⁸, and called him Moses, which means rescued from the waters. Moses, saved in his infancy from the cruelty of Pharaoh, is a type of Jesus, rescued, also, in His infancy from the power of Herod.

⁷ By name, Mary. — ⁸ She clothed him, educated him, and had him altogether treated, as if he were her own son.

II. Commentary.

The Wisdom of Divine Providence. God destined Moses to be the deliverer of His chosen people. Pharaoh's cruel command to drown all the baby boys of the Israelites could not nullify what He had decreed. On the contrary, it served, under His guidance, for the accomplishment of His designs; + for Moses, being brought up in the king's court, was educated in the knowledge of the Egyptians, and was thus prepared for his high vocation of leader and deliverer of God's people.

The uses of tribulation. God permitted the Israelites to be oppressed, in order that they might begin to yearn for the + Promised Land and the future Saviour, and might keep aloof from the Egyptians. All our various troubles in this life ought to detach our hearts from earthly things, and turn * them towards heaven and eternity. If earth were a paradise, who would long for heaven?

The love of parents for their children. If it had been discovered that Moses's parents had hidden away a son, they

would have been severely punished, and most likely put to death. Parents are willing to expose themselves to a great deal of danger for the sake of their children.

The confidence in God, shown by Moses's parents. They did what they could to save the child, and prayed, full of confidence, to God to help them. Their confidence was not misplaced. He who trusts in God builds on a sure foundation.

Compassion. The king's daughter was a pagan, and yet, she had a kind, compassionate heart. How much more compassion ought we Christians to show! "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." The Society of the Holy Childhood is an example of what can be done. By means of it, heathen children are saved from death, baptized and brought up as Christians.

III. Application.

God has preserved you, too, from many a danger. In order to save your soul, God has, so to speak, made you pass through the waters of Baptism, and has adopted you to be the child of the Most High King. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed on us" (1 John 3, 1). You are, therefore, another Moses. Serve God, then, as faithfully as Moses served Him.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE FLIGHT OF MOSES.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

MOSESES was reared at the court of Pharaoh, and instructed in all the learning of Egypt. But when he was grown up and saw the misery of his people, the Hebrews, he resolved to help them. For he would rather be afflicted and despised with the people of God, than live in the palace of a wicked king. He left the splendour of the court¹, and openly declared himself a friend of the Israelites².

The king, hearing this, sought to kill him; but Moses fled to the land of Madian³. On his way he sat down by a well, and behold, the seven daughters of Jethro came to draw water for their flocks. But when the sheep stood near

the troughs, some shepherds rushed in and rudely drove away the flock. Thereupon Moses arose, defended the maidens, and watered their sheep.

Then the sisters went home, and their father asked: "Why have ye returned sooner than usual?" They answered: "A man of Egypt drove away the shepherds, and gave our sheep to drink." Jethro asked again: "Where is he? Call him that he may eat bread." So Moses entered the house and swore to dwell with Jethro, and remained for forty years⁴, and married Sephora, one of the daughters of Jethro.

+ Moses, despising the splendour of Egypt in order to comfort the Jews, is a figure of the Son of God, Who came down from heaven, was born in a stable, and laid in a manger, to redeem us from the flames of hell.

¹ He left the king's court, when he was forty years old. — ² and did what he could to defend them against the oppression of the Egyptians. — ³ This land was in the neighbourhood of Mount Sinai.

> The inhabitants of this district were descended from Abraham, and had kept their faith in the true God. It is well to distinguish between them and the heathen Madianites, who lived further east (see map). — ⁴ During that time Moses lived a simple and solitary life. He prayed fervently to God, especially for the deliverance of his people; he practised humility and self-denial, and learnt the ways of the wilderness, thus preparing himself for his calling.

II. Commentary.

✓ *Steadfast faith.* Moses, while living at home with his parents, had been taught to believe in the true God, and the promised Redeemer. When he left home, he went to live at the king's court, and was surrounded on all sides by pagans. Still he + preserved the true faith, taught to him as a boy, and remained firm in the worship of the one true God. When he was a man, he preferred to be poor and persecuted, rather than rich and honoured, and yet unable to help his brethren in the faith. He, therefore, left the pagan court, and joined his oppressed countrymen.

+ *The blessings of solitude.* It was in his solitude that God appeared to Moses. God is to be found, not in the turmoil of the world, but in solitude. There He speaks to our hearts, and there we can speak to Him. He who is always in society, must be distracted, and cannot pray well. All the saints loved solitude, and sought it out, so that

they might be alone with God. St. Bernard praised it in these words: "O blessed solitude! O sole blessedness!"

III. Application.

O, may you, when you grow up, be as steadfast in faith as Moses was, and never forget or deny that Christian teaching, which you are now receiving in your youth. Pray for steadfastness and perseverance in the holy Catholic faith! †

Cannot you sometimes contrive to be alone for a few minutes, imitating in this St. Aloysius, who used to retire into some corner of his father's house, so as to be able to pray undisturbed?

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BURNING BUSH.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

NOW, Moses fed the sheep of Jethro, his father-in-law. One day he drove his flock into the desert¹, and came as far as Mount Horeb². There the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire, which issued from the midst of a bush. Moses saw that the bush was on fire and was not burnt³. He said: "I will go near to see why the bush is not burnt." As Moses drew near, the Lord cried out to him from the burning bush: "Moses, Moses!" And he answered: "Here I am." And God said: "Come not nigh hither. Put off the shoes from thy feet⁴; for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground⁵. I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob."

Moses, in awful reverence, hid⁶ his face, and dared not look at God. The Lord said to him: "I have seen the affliction of My people in Egypt⁷, and I am come to deliver them out of the hands⁸ of the Egyptians, and to bring them out of that land into a land, that floweth with milk and honey."⁹ The Lord further told Moses that he should go to Pharaoh to demand the liberation of the children of Israel. Moses answered: "Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh, and should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt?"¹⁰ The Lord said: "I will be with thee."¹¹

¹ An uninhabited and sterile country, stony and sandy, in which grass and shrubs grew only here and there. — ² which was part of Mount Sinai. — ³ The fire was supernatural, not natural. — ⁴ The removal of shoes, or sandals, was a mark of reverence. The Jewish priests had to be bare-footed, when serving in the sanctuary. — ⁵ because God had manifested Himself there. — ⁶ or covered it (see picture). — ⁷ and heard their cry for help and deliverance. — ⁸ or from the power of the Egyptians. — ⁹ such a rich, fertile land that milk and honey are produced from it. — ¹⁰ How can I, a poor shepherd, undertake such a great work? — ¹¹ "I will protect you and stand by you."

Moses declared¹² that the people would not believe him, but would ask, who sent him¹³. Then, God said to Moses: *"I am Who am"*¹⁴. Thus shalt thou say to the children of Israel: *"He who is, hath sent me to you"*. Moses answered and said: "They will not believe me, nor hear my voice; but they will say: 'The Lord hath not appeared to thee'."¹⁵ Then, God asked Moses: "What is it that thou holdest in thy hand?" Moses answered: "A rod."¹⁶ The Lord, then, told Moses to cast his rod upon the ground. He threw it upon the ground, and the rod was turned into a serpent, so that Moses fled from it in terror.

But the Lord called him back, saying: "Take it by the tail." Moses did so, and the serpent became again a rod. The Lord told Moses to work this and some other signs before the Israelites, and they would believe. But Moses still objected¹⁷, saying that he was not eloquent, but that his speech was slow and hesitating¹⁸.

✓ Then, the Lord said to him: "Who made man's mouth? Or, who made the dumb and the deaf, the seeing and the blind? Did not I?"¹⁹ Go, therefore, and I will teach thee what thou shalt speak." Moses answered²⁰: "I beseech Thee, Lord, send whom Thou wilt send."²¹ The Lord, being angry with Moses²², said: "Aaron, thy brother, is eloquent; speak to him, and put my words into his mouth; he shall speak, in thy stead, to the people."²³ So Moses returned to Egypt; and Aaron, his brother, inspired by the Lord, came forth to meet him.

Moses repeated to his brother all the words of the Lord. Then, they went together to assemble the children of Israel;



and Aaron spoke to them that the Lord had looked upon their affliction. And Moses wrought the sign of the rod, and other miracles, whereupon the people believed²⁴; and, falling down, they adored the Lord²⁵.

As the people of Israel would not have believed that God had sent Moses to free them from slavery, but for the miracles he wrought; so we should not receive any one as sent by God, in a special manner, except he prove his mission by signs and miracles.

¹² Moses made a second objection. — ¹³ Why would they ask this? In order to prove, whether it were the true God, who had appeared to him. — ¹⁴ I am He who exists of Himself. — ¹⁵ This is the third time that Moses raised an objection. — ¹⁶ his shepherd's staff. This staff, consecrated by these miracles, was to be the sign of Moses's leadership of the people. — ¹⁷ for the fourth time. — ¹⁸ and he would be unable to act as spokesman. — ¹⁹ Am I not He who gave the gift of speech to man? Cannot I make thee eloquent? — ²⁰ Although the Lord had answered his four previous objections, Moses still could not resign himself completely to the will of God, and made a fifth objection. — ²¹ Send the Redeemer! Send Him at once that He may deliver Thy people! — ²² because he would not submit

to His will. — ²³ Tell him all that I have said, and he will tell it to the people. — ²⁴ that Moses was sent by God. — ²⁵ Had they not prayed to God before? Yes, indeed; but now, they thanked Him for having mercy on them, and for sending a liberator to them.

II. Commentary.

The Attributes of God. This story reveals God to us in a wonderful way. It shows us that:

1. God is *eternal*. "I am Who am!" God exists of Himself. He has His being of Himself. He is Who is, and was, and is to be. He alone is eternal. All else has been made by Him.

2. God is *unchanging*. His command: Thou shalt bring My people out of Egypt, could not be altered by any hesitations or objections on the part of Moses.

+ 3. God is *omniscient*. "I have seen the affliction of My people, and heard their cry." — "Do these signs, and they will believe."

4. God is *almighty*. "Who made the dumb and the deaf; the seeing and the blind? Did not I?" God's power was also proved by the miracles of the rod &c.

> 5. God is *holy*. "The Lord was angry with Moses", i. e. He showed His displeasure with Moses, for having so little confidence, and for making so many objections.

6. God is *merciful*. "I will deliver them out of the hands of the Egyptians."

> 7. God is *faithful*. He fulfilled that which He promised to Jacob: "I will bring thee and thy seed back from Egypt."

The object of miracles. Moses was the first of those sent by God, who received the power of working miracles; and, as we are told, the object of these miracles was that the children of Israel might believe. How much more, then, ought we to believe in Jesus Christ, Who worked so many more, and much greater miracles, than did Moses! The difference between our Lord's miracles and those of Moses is this, that Moses wrought them by the power of God; and our Lord by His own power.

Humility, and confidence in God. One of Moses's most prominent virtues was a sincere humility. He held himself to be neither capable nor worthy of the great task, allotted

to him by God. But it was just on account of his humility that God chose him to be the leader of His chosen people, for He "exalteth the humble, and abaseth the proud". Moses, however, failed, by giving way to so many hesitations. After God had said: "I will be with thee", he ought to have said, as St. Paul did: "I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4, 13). Instead of that, he made more and more objections, and, on account of this, Almighty God reproached and blamed him. At last, however, he obeyed God's commands, and, full of the utmost confidence, he accomplished his appointed task splendidly. True humility, distrusts itself, but trusts all the more in God.

III. Application. +

You are not called on to take off your shoes, when you enter a church; but you are called on to leave all worldly thoughts outside. You are not obliged to cover your eyes, but you ought to hold them in check, and be recollected, and not look about you curiously.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE TEN PLAGUES OF EGYPT.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

MOSES and Aaron went to Pharaoh, and demanded, in the name of God, that he should allow the people of Israel to go out into the desert to offer sacrifice to the Lord. Pharaoh proudly answered: "Who is the Lord that I should hear His voice¹, and let the people go? I know not the Lord, neither will I let Israel go." And from that day forth, he ordered the overseers and taskmasters to oppress the Israelites more and more, by putting them to still harder work.

The Lord told Moses and Aaron to appear again before Pharaoh. They did, as the Lord commanded, and Aaron cast his rod before Pharaoh, and it was changed into a serpent. Pharaoh called the magicians, and they, by enchantments and certain secrets², also turned their rods into serpents; but Aaron's rod devoured their rods. Yet the heart of Pharaoh

remained hardened³, and he would not let the people go. Then, the Lord sent ten plagues upon the Egyptians⁴.

1/ Next morning, Aaron went, by the command of God, to the bank of the Nile, and struck the river with his rod, and instantly it was turned into blood. Thereupon the fish died, the water was corrupted, and the water of all the streams and ponds in Egypt was turned into blood. And the Egyptians dug new wells round about the river; for they could not drink the water of the river. Even then, the heart of Pharaoh did not relent.

2/ After seven days, Aaron stretched forth his hand over the rivers and streams and pools of Egypt, and immediately a multitude of frogs came forth from the waters, and covered the whole land of Egypt. They entered the houses and the ovens, and covered the tables and the beds, and spared neither the hut of the peasant nor the palace of the king. Then Pharaoh, being frightened, called for Moses and Aaron, and said to them: "Pray ye the Lord to take away the frogs from me, and from my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the Lord." Moses did, as the king desired, and the frogs disappeared.

3/ But, when Pharaoh saw that the frogs were gone, he hardened his heart again. Then, Aaron was commanded by God to strike with his rod the dust of the earth; and instantly myriads of gnats arose, and tormented both men and beasts throughout all Egypt. All the dust of the earth was turned into gnats. But Pharaoh's heart remained obdurate.

1 "I do not know your God, and will not be commanded by Him." Pharaoh, in his pride, would not acknowledge God to be the Lord. Therefore, God sent the ten plagues, to compel Pharaoh and his people to admit that He is Lord over the whole earth. — 2 They worked apparent miracles by arts, known only to themselves, and by the help of the devil. — 3 He was stubborn like the firmly rooted trunk or stump of a tree. — 4 The plagues were sent through the medium of Moses and Aaron, who, in God's name, commanded the very elements and powers of nature, and they obeyed.

4/ Then, the Lord sent a very grievous swarm of flies into the houses of Pharaoh and his servants, and the whole land was corrupted by them. Then, Pharaoh's heart began to fail,



and he said to Moses and Aaron: "I will let you go to sacrifice to the Lord your God in the wilderness; but go no further. Pray for me." But when God, at the prayer of Moses, had banished the flies, Pharaoh's heart grew hard again, and he refused to let the people go.

Then, God sent a plague on the cattle, which destroyed the best part of the flocks and herds of the Egyptians, but spared those of the Israelites. Still Pharaoh would not submit. Then, Moses was ordered by God to take handfuls of ashes from the chimney and sprinkle it in the air in the presence of Pharaoh. Forthwith the Egyptians were covered with boils and swelling blains. But even this did not soften Pharaoh's heart.

Then again, Moses stretched forth his rod towards heaven, and the Lord sent down thunder and hail, and lightning, running along the ground; and the hail, mixed with fire, drove on, and smote every herb of the field and every tree of the country, and killed every man and beast, that were in the open fields. None of it fell, however, in the land of Gessen, where the children of Israel dwelt. Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron, and said: "I have sinned this time also. Pray ye the Lord that the thunder may cease, and that I may let you go." But when, at the prayer of Moses, the

hail had ceased, the king broke his promise, and his heart became exceedingly hard.

Then, the Lord sent a burning wind, which blew all that day and night; and in the morning, the locusts came⁵, and they covered the whole face of the earth and wasted all things, devouring the grass of the earth, and whatever fruits the hail had left; and there remained not anything that was green, either on the trees, or in the herbs in all Egypt. Therefore, Pharaoh in haste called Moses and Aaron, saying: "Forgive me my sin this time also, and pray to the Lord your God that He take away from me this death." Moses prayed to the Lord, and the Lord sent a very strong wind from the west, which took the locusts, and threw them into the Red Sea. This time, again, Pharaoh hardened his heart.

Then, Moses stretched forth his hand towards heaven, and there came a horrible darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days. No man saw his brother, nor moved himself out of the place, where he was⁶. But where the children of Israel dwelt, there was light. Then, Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron, saying: "Go, sacrifice to the Lord — let your sheep only and your herds remain." Moses answered: "All the flocks shall go with us." Thereupon the king hardened his heart again, and would not let the people go. Moreover he said to Moses: "Get thee from me. In what day soever thou shalt come into my sight, thou shalt die." Moses replied: "I will not see thy face any more."

⁵ A horribly dense swarm of creatures, something like grasshoppers, but three or four inches long, passed over the land, devouring every thing green, on which they settled. — ⁶ In the Book of Wisdom (17, 2 &c.) this terrible darkness is thus described: "For while the wicked (Egyptians) thought to have dominion over the holy nation, Thou didst fetter them with the bonds of darkness and a long night, shut up in their own houses. No power of fire could give them light, neither could the bright flames of the stars enlighten that horrible night. For if any one were a husbandman, or a shepherd, or a labourer in the field, and was suddenly overtaken, he endured a necessity, from which he could not fly. For they were all bound together in one chain of darkness." The darkness, being the effect of a miracle, and meant to serve as a plague, was more dense than the darkest night.

II. Commentary.

The object of the plagues, with which God visited the Egyptians, was manifold. These plagues, which devastated Egypt, while they did not touch the land of Gessen, were sent, firstly, to teach Pharaoh and his people that the God of Israel was also Lord over Egypt, and the one true and Almighty God. Secondly, to convert the haughty king, and force him to obey the commandments of God. Thirdly, to punish Pharaoh and his people for their unreasonable idolatry, and their cruel oppression of the people of God. The Egyptians worshipped the Nile as a god, and now, destruction was brought upon them by means of it. Disease killed their cattle, which were objects of their worship; and lower creatures, such as gnats, flies and locusts, inflicted torments on them. Thus, they were punished by the very things through which they sinned. Fourthly, the plagues were sent to teach the pagans that the gods, whom they worshipped, were vain and powerless, for, however earnestly they appealed to them, they could obtain no help from them. Fifthly, they were intended to confirm the Israelites in their belief in the one true God; in confidence in Him, who protected them in such a wonderful way; and to fill their hearts with gratitude towards Him.

The Justice and Patience of God. By these ten plagues, Almighty God not only manifested His terrible justice, but also His merciful patience. He sent the first plague, only after the miracles, worked before Pharaoh, had produced no effect. The plagues gradually succeeded each other, beginning by those which were less, and, when these availed nothing, becoming more and more dreadful. Moreover, they did not follow each other day after day, but between each plague there was an interval of days, sometimes of weeks.

Impenitence. Pharaoh is a warning example of impenitence and obduracy. God did not warn him only outwardly, by Moses's words and by the ten plagues, but also inwardly, by His grace. But Pharaoh would neither listen to the admonitions of God, nor obey the movements of divine grace, and thus, by rendering himself unworthy of further graces, he, at last, became quite hardened. Once or twice he made

good resolutions about letting God's people go, but, as soon as the pressure of necessity was removed, he did not keep them. God foretold to him the last and worst plague some fourteen days before it was sent, and would, in His mercy, have spared Pharaoh and his people this last terrible visitation, if only he would have consented to let the Israelites go. Pharaoh, however, despised the divine warning as an empty threat, and remained hardened. He is the type of a defiant sinner, who will not listen to any exhortations, does not carry out good resolutions, perseveres in sin, and finally becomes quite hardened.

III. Application.

Are you at all like Pharaoh? Do you pay attention to the admonitions of your parents, confessor &c.? Have you made good resolutions with your lips only, or have you taken real pains to give up your bad habits? Have you ever made a bad confession, and concealed your sins? All this would be the beginning of impenitence, and would lead you to obduracy and the loss of your soul. Pay heed, then, to the warnings of those set over you; listen to the inspirations of divine grace, and the voice of your conscience, so that your heart may not grow obstinate and hard. St. Paul is urgent in his warnings against obduracy: "According to thy hardness and impenitent heart thou treasurest up to thyself wrath against the day of wrath, and revelation of the just judgment of God" (Rom. 2, 5).

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE PASCHAL LAMB.—DEPARTURE FROM EGYPT.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

THE Lord spoke again to Moses: "Yet one plague more will I bring upon Pharaoh and Egypt, and after that he will let you go and thrust you out." Now, Moses was a very great man in the land of Egypt, in the sight of Pharaoh's servants and of all the people.

Moses, therefore, spoke to all the people: "Thus saith the Lord: 'At midnight I will enter into Egypt; and every



first-born¹ in the land of Egypt shall die, from the first-born of Pharaoh, who sitteth on his throne, even to the first-born of the hand-maid, that is at the mill, and all the first-born of the beasts; and there shall be a great cry in all the land of Egypt, such as neither hath been before, nor shall be hereafter. But with all the children of Israel there shall be no death, nor mourning that you may know, how wonderful a difference the Lord maketh between the Egyptians and Israel. And all these thy servants shall come down to me, saying: Go forth, thou and all the people, that is under thee. After that we will go out.”

After this, Moses and Aaron spoke to the children of Israel, telling them of the Lord's command to kill, in every family, a lamb without blemish, on the fourteenth day of the month², and to sprinkle the door-posts with the blood of the lamb³. The Lord also commanded that, on the same night, they should eat the flesh of the lamb with unleavened bread⁴ and wild lettuce⁵. They should, moreover, have their loins girt⁶, and shoes on their feet and staves in their hand⁷; for that it was the passage of the Lord⁸, and that,

on that night, His angel would slay every first-born of the Egyptians.

¹ i. e. the eldest son in every house, and the leading ox &c. in every stall. — ² When Moses announced the institution of the Pasch, they were in the seventh month of the year, which had hitherto begun at the autumnal equinox, or about the middle of September. Henceforward this seventh month, in which fell the vernal equinox, was to be the beginning of the year. — ³ The lamb was to be one year old, and without blemish, i. e. fine and healthy. The paschal lamb was to be a burnt-offering, and everything that was offered to God, had to be of the best. — ⁴ Bread, baked without leaven or yeast. Baked cakes were used, made of flour and water, such as the Jews still use at paschal time. As the fermentation, caused by leaven, is a form of corruption, the absence of leaven was a type of incorruption. — ⁵ a herb with a bitter taste. — ⁶ They were to fasten up their robes by a girdle round their hips, so that they might be ready to start on their journey at a moment's notice. — ⁷ therefore, actually ready to start. — ⁸ The day was called the Pasch, or passage of the Lord, because the angel of God, who killed the first-born of the Egyptians, passed over the houses of the Israelites, the doors of which were sprinkled with the blood of the lamb.

The Israelites did as they were commanded, and, at midnight, the fourteenth day of the month, the destroying angel visited every house in Egypt and slew every first-born, from the king's own to the first-born of the captive woman in prison. But the houses of the Jews he did not enter; for the doors thereof were sprinkled with the blood of the lamb. And a fearful cry arose from all the land of Egypt, because there was death in every house⁹.

And Pharaoh arose in the night, and, struck with terror, he besought Moses and Aaron to go with the Israelites, and take with them their herds and all they possessed. "Go," he said, "and, departing, bless me." The Egyptians themselves pressed¹⁰ the people to go forth speedily, saying: "We shall all die." Then, the people of God rose up in haste, while it was yet night, and began their journey, taking the unleavened bread with them. Moses also carried the bones of Joseph with him¹¹.

The descendants of Jacob had lived in Egypt four hundred and thirty years. Leaving Egypt, they numbered six hundred thousand men¹², besides women and children. Moses com-

manded the people, saying: "Remember this day, in which, with a strong hand¹³, the Lord brought you forth out of this place, that you eat none but unleavened bread." He also told them to sanctify unto the Lord every first-born¹⁴, because the Lord had spared their first-born children on the night, on which He slew every first-born of the Egyptians.

The paschal lamb was a figure of Jesus, Who died on the Cross for the sins of men. As the destroying angel dared not to enter the houses of the Jews, that were sprinkled with the blood of the lamb, so the devil has no power over those Christians, who receive worthily the Body and Blood of our Lord in Holy Communion. In Pharaoh we behold a sad picture of a man, grown old in sin. When oppressed by calamity, he seemed to repent, but, as soon as the danger was past, he fell back into his pride and hardness of heart.

⁹ It was the eldest sons, the hope and prop of their parents, who lay dead. — ¹⁰ forced them to go. — ¹¹ in fulfilment of Joseph's dying wish (Chapt. XXVII). — ¹² such men as were capable of fighting in time of war. The whole number of living souls was over two million. — ¹³ with great might, by which he overcame the stubbornness of Pharaoh. — ¹⁴ All the first-born of clean beasts had to be sacrificed to the Lord. The first-born of those which were unclean had to be redeemed with money. All first-born sons were consecrated to God, to be the priests of the family. Soon after this, however, the tribe of Levi was substituted for the first-born (Chapt. XXXIX) and, from thenceforward, the first-born sons had to be redeemed with money from the special service of God. Almighty God, to Whom everything belongs, laid a special claim on the first-born of the Israelites, because He had spared their first-born in Egypt.

II. Commentary.

† *The avenging Justice of God.* The slaying of the first-born in Egypt was a punishment, sent by God on account of the obstinate unbelief of Pharaoh and his people. This shows the justice of God. If Pharaoh had been converted by the lesser plagues, he would have been spared this last terrible one. Many sinners, who care nothing about God, can only be converted by means of some severe visitation. No one can resist God, because He is almighty. They who defy Him, must and will feel the weight of His avenging justice,

either in this world or in the next. "Thou art Lord of all, and there is none that can resist Thy majesty" (Esth. 13, 11).

The Faithfulness of God. All those promises, which God made about increasing the people of Israel, and delivering them from Egypt, were faithfully fulfilled.

God is Lord over life and death. By the first plagues, God proved that He was Lord of all nature. By the last, and worst, plague, He showed that He was Lord over life and death, because in one night He slew the first-born in every Egyptian house, while not one of the Israelites was touched.

The Paschal Lamb, a type of Jesus Christ. The paschal lamb was a sacrifice, for it is expressly said (Ex. 12, 27) that it was "the victim of the passage of the Lord". As such, it was pre-eminently a type of our Lord, and principally in the following ways. The paschal lamb was to be without blemish: Jesus Christ is the Most Pure, the Most Holy, "a lamb unspotted and undefiled" (1 Pet. 1, 19). The paschal Lamb was killed, and its blood spilt: Jesus Christ was slain for us on the altar of the Cross, and shed all His Blood for us. Of the paschal lamb "no bone was to be broken": contrary to the usual custom with those crucified, not one of our Lord's bones was broken. Through the blood of the paschal lamb, the Israelites were saved from temporal death: through the Precious Blood of Jesus Christ, we are saved from the spiritual death of sin, and the eternal death of hell. The paschal lamb, therefore, foreshowed that the future Saviour would be unspotted; that He would sacrifice Himself for us; that He would give His Life and Blood for us; that not one of His bones would be broken; and that we, through His sacrifice, would be saved from death.

There is no salvation, except through Jesus Christ. The blood of the paschal lamb obtained mercy for the Israelites, and saved them from death, only because it was a type of the Redeemer of the world. Its atoning and saving power did not lie in itself, but came from the Blood of Jesus Christ, Whose sacrifice and death were pre-figured by the death of the lamb. The Israelites, because they sacrificed the

paschal lamb, and sprinkled their houses with its blood, having faith in the future Redeemer, were spared, by reason of that faith. Even in the Old Testament, it was only through faith in the (future) Redeemer that men could obtain pardon.

The meaning of the Paschal Feast in the Old Law and the New Law. The Jewish Pasch was instituted by God through Moses, in thankful commemoration of the deliverance of the Israelites from their slavery in Egypt, and also as a type of their future deliverance from sin and hell. The Christian Paschal Feast was instituted by God, through His Church, in thankful commemoration of the redemption of all mankind from sin and hell by Jesus Christ, as also of our deliverance by Him from the bondage of Satan, and the overcoming of the death of the body by His glorious ascension. The former was a reminder of the promise of redemption, the latter a reminder of its fulfilment, of our real redemption by the Lamb of God, Who taketh away the sins of the world.

The importance of the Paschal Feast, as a type of our redemption, is shown by the command of God to make it from thenceforth the beginning of a new year.

The Paschal Lamb, a type of Holy Communion. The paschal lamb was not only a sacrifice; it was also a food, which had to be partaken of. In Holy Communion, our Lord, the true Paschal Lamb, gives Himself to us to be the Food of our souls. This priceless Food, if it is to nourish us, must be partaken of, mingled with the "bitter herb" of penance and a sincere confession of our sins. If we receive It worthily, It strengthens us for our journey through the wilderness of this life, and will enable us to reach the Promised Land of everlasting happiness. "He that eateth this bread," said our Lord, "shall live for ever" (John 6, 59).

The connection between type and fulfilment. It could not be said that the bones of our Lord were not broken, because the bones of the paschal lamb, which was a type of Him, were not broken. The case must be reversed; for a type points to the person typified, and not the person to the type. Because, therefore, God, in His omniscience, knew that no bone of the crucified Redeemer would be broken, He commanded that no bone should be broken of the paschal lamb, which was intended to be a type of that Redeemer. It is the same with all types. The omniscient God has so disposed them that they point on to the Redeemer, His work and His kingdom.

Persons and things as types. The types, about which you have till now learnt (Adam, Abel, Noe, Melchisedech, Isaac, Joseph and Job),

were *men*. But the paschal lamb, and the slaying of the first-born, were *things*. You will come across many other things, which were types of our Lord, such as the manna, the brazen serpent &c. &c.

III. Application.

How the Israelites must have thanked God, when their first-born sons were spared, and when they were delivered from the cruel slavery of Egypt! Thank God daily that His only-begotten Son has redeemed you, has won pardon for you, and has opened heaven to you. Serve God with a grateful love, for you were dedicated to His service at your Baptism. Above all things, hear Mass willingly and devoutly, and be thankful to the Lamb of God, Who daily sacrifices Himself for you.

When you obey your evil inclinations and passions, you are still in the bonds of the cruel servitude of Satan and sin. Tear yourself away from this ignominious slavery. Seek out, and fight against, your besetting sin. Make resolutions against it every morning when you say your prayers, and examine your conscience about it in the evening.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

PASSAGE OF THE RED SEA.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

NOW, God Himself conducted the Israelites in their march, going before them by day in a pillar¹ of cloud, by night in a pillar of flame. They, at length, reached the shores of the Red Sea², where they pitched their tents³. Suddenly Pharaoh repented of having allowed the Israelites to go⁴, and pursued them with chariots⁵ and horsemen, and with his whole army⁶; and he overtook them at night-fall near the Red Sea.

When the Israelites saw the Egyptians behind them, they were seized with fear, and cried to the Lord for help⁷. Moses, however, calmed and encouraged them, saying: "The Lord will fight for you." At the same time the pillar of cloud, which had gone before them, went back and stood between their camp and the army of the Egyptians. Moreover,



the cloud gave light to the Israelites, but it made the night darker for the Egyptians, so that they could not see nor stir for the rest of the night. Then Moses, commanded by God, stretched his rod over the sea, and immediately the waters divided and stood like a wall on either side, leaving a dry road between for the children of Israel to pass over. And the children of Israel went in through the midst of the sea.

¹ A cloud, which raised itself up like a pillar, so that it could be seen by all the people. In this cloud, which, later on, rested on the Ark of the Covenant (Chapt. XXXVIII), God was present in an especial manner, to prove to the Israelites that He was their leader and protector. — ² The track, followed by the Israelites, is marked by a blue line on map I. — ³ They encamped to rest for the night. —

⁴ His first terror, caused by the slaying of the first-born, was passed, and his old spirit of defiance had returned. He and his people wished to revenge themselves on the Israelites for the death of their sons, and seize them, to reduce them once more to slavery. — ⁵ cars full of soldiers, who, from these chariots, attacked the enemy with arrows, spears and swords. — ⁶ which was more than 200 000 strong. —

⁷ The Israelites really were in a terrible position. Before them lay the deep sea, behind them Pharaoh's host; to right and left of them were high mountains! They could not possibly have escaped, if God

had not helped them. But the Lord, in order to strengthen His people's faith, worked a mighty miracle, and made the water to cease to flow, and rear itself up like two walls, letting the people of Israel pass between them to the other side.

At the dawn of day, the Egyptians pursued them into the midst of the sea. But suddenly a great tempest arose⁸, and overthrew their chariots and horsemen. And the Lord said to Moses: "Stretch thy hand over the sea"; and behold! the divided waters came together again, swallowing up Pharaoh and his whole army, so that not one of the Egyptians escaped.

Thus did the Lord, by a splendid miracle, deliver the Hebrews that day from the Egyptians. And the people feared the Lord, and believed in Him⁹, and in Moses, His servant. The passage of the Red Sea is a figure of the Sacrament of Baptism. There was no other way left to the Israelites to escape from Pharaoh and enter the Land of Promise, save through the waters of the Red Sea; so is there no way to escape from the power of the devil and to enter heaven, except through the waters of Baptism. In the death of Pharaoh and his army we have an example of the divine justice. Pharaoh and his servants had made a law to drown the Hebrew babies in the Nile. In punishment for this cruelty he and his army were swallowed up by the waves of the sea.

⁸ Thunder and lightning burst from the cloud, and the whole army of Pharaoh fell into disorder. — ⁹ They believed even more than they had done.

II. Commentary.

The almighty Power of God divided the waters, held them up as walls on either side, made the burning wind to blow, and the lightning to strike the Egyptians.

God's Goodness to His people is shown throughout the whole story. First, He led His people by a visible means (the pillar of cloud). Then, He worked a great miracle, and saved them, for good and all, from the power of the Egyptians. By the destruction of their army the Egyptians were so weakened, and the damage done to them so lasting, that they were unable to molest the Israelites, the whole time they were wandering in the wilderness.

The retributive Justice of God. Pharaoh's terrible end was a punishment for his impenitence and obstinate resistance of God's grace. His people were punished also, and perished with him. The Egyptians drowned the Israelite babes in the Nile, and, in punishment for this, their sons were drowned in the sea. How terrible is God's justice!

Confidence in God. While the Israelites, filled with fear, called upon the Lord for help, Moses remained perfectly calm. Full of confidence in God, he said to the people: "Fear nothing! The Lord will fight for you": and his confidence was justified and rewarded, for God, to Whom nature is subject, sent thunder and lightning, wind and rain to their aid. God can help us, when all other help is useless. The greater the need, the nearer is God!

Seeming conversion. Pharaoh was not really converted. The death of the first-born frightened and staggered him, so that he let the Israelites go. But, when the first terror was over, he returned to his former obduracy, and again defied God. He wished to overcome God's will, and bring back His people by force of arms. But, at last, the measure of his sins was full. He had despised the warnings of God's mercy, so now, God's justice overtook him, and he died a miserable death. He was like those sinners, who in times of tribulation, such as sickness or misfortune, promise to amend their ways, but who, when the trial is removed, do not keep their promise, and fall back into their old habits and forgetfulness of God. — Such sinners will die an impenitent death, as Pharaoh did, and be lost eternally. "Hell is paved with good intentions."

The object of miracles. The people feared God, because they saw His power and justice with their own eyes; and they believed that Moses was sent by God, because it was through him that His great miracles were wrought.

The Passage of the Red Sea, a type of Baptism. The passage of the Red Sea was (according to 1 Cor. 10, 1) a type of holy Baptism. As the Israelites had to pass through the Red Sea in order to escape from the slavery of Pharaoh, and reach the Promised Land, so must we pass through the waters of Baptism in order to be freed from the slavery of sin and Satan, and finally attain to heaven.

Faith, our guide. We also want a guide on our way through life. Who will be our guide? God leads us through the wilderness of

this life to the promised land of heaven, by His holy faith, which Jesus Christ, the Light of the world, taught and deposited in His Church. If we follow the light of faith; if we, that is, live up to our faith, we are sure to arrive at our heavenly home. "I am the Light of the world: he that followeth Me, walketh not in darkness but shall have the light of life" (John 8, 12).

III. Application.

Moses and the children of Israel sang a canticle of praise in thanksgiving for their wonderful deliverance. It began by the words: "Let us sing to the Lord, for He is gloriously magnified: The horse and the rider He hath thrown into the sea."

You too should thank the Lord God frequently for your creation, preservation and redemption. Thank Him daily for your Baptism, and for the holy Catholic faith.

· CHAPTER XXXV.

THE MIRACLES, WROUGHT IN THE DESERT.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

AFTER the people of God had crossed the Red Sea, Moses ordered them to go on towards the wilderness. They marched three days through the wilderness, and found no water¹. Finding some², at last³, they could not drink it, because it was bitter⁴. The people murmured against Moses, saying: "What shall we drink?" Moses prayed, and the Lord showed him a tree, which, when cast into the water, rendered it sweet⁵.

¹ They had no drinking water. They could have got sea-water, but this, being salt, does not quench the thirst, but rather increases it. — ² at Mara (see map). — ³ after three days of thirst. — ⁴ It was briny, so that neither men nor beasts could drink it. — ⁵ so called in contradistinction to salt water. Drinkable water is known as fresh, or sweet water.

And when they had gone far into the wilderness⁶, the people began to murmur still more, seeing that there was no food, and they wished that they had remained and died in Egypt, asking Moses, why he had brought them out into the wilderness to die. Instead of punishing them for their



want of confidence, God, full of mercy and goodness, promised to give them food in abundance.

He sent them, accordingly, in the evening, quails in vast numbers, sufficient for all the children of Israel to eat; and, in the morning, a delicious white food fell from heaven. When the Israelites saw the bread, which looked like hoarfrost, they exclaimed “Manhu”, which signifies: “What is this?” Moses informed them that it was the bread, which the Lord gave them⁷. He, then, told every one to gather of it, as much as he needed.

They did so, and found it pleasant to eat, tasting like flour mixed with honey. On the day before the Sabbath, they gathered a double quantity, as none fell on the Sabbath. This Manna⁸ was their food for forty years, until they reached the confines of Chanaan⁹.

⁶ They had now been four weeks in the wilderness, and had exhausted the provisions, which they had brought with them from Egypt.

⁷ without any intervention on the part of man. — ⁸ This word came from “Manhu”, and means the same thing. — ⁹ The fall of Manna went on, and was renewed every day except Saturday.

Some time after these events, they encamped in another part of the desert, where again there was no water. Here also they murmured against Moses, and blamed him for having brought them out of Egypt. Then, Moses reproved them for their want of confidence in God; and, addressing the Lord in prayer, he asked, what he should do¹⁰. The Lord commanded him to strike a rock¹¹ on the side of Mount Horeb with his rod. Moses did so, and a stream of pure water burst forth from the rock, so that all the people and the cattle could quench their thirst at will.

¹⁰ "What shall I do with this people?" said he. "Yet a little more, and they will stone me." The anger of the people against Moses was, therefore, very great. — ¹¹ which He would show to him. God had said to Moses: "I will stand there before thee on the rock Horeb" (Ex. 17, 6).

At this time, the Amalekites¹² marched against the chosen people. Moses sent Josue¹³ with a number of picked men against them. During the battle, Moses prayed on the top of the hill. As long as his hands were uplifted¹⁴, the Israelites remained victorious; but when, through fatigue, he let them sink, they lost. Hence Aaron and Hur¹⁵ upheld his hands, until the enemy was put to flight.

The tree, which sweetened the water of the desert, was a figure of the Cross, which sweetens the sufferings of this life. The Manna, which daily fell from heaven, and sustained the Israelites for forty years in the desert, was a figure of Christ in the holy Eucharist, Who, every day, during the holy Mass, descends from heaven to nourish our souls for life everlasting. The water, which flowed from the rock, when struck by Moses, signifies the grace, which flows so abundantly for us from the Sacraments of the Church.

¹² They were descendants of Esau, and were a wild, marauding and pagan people, who lived in the country between Chanaan and the Red Sea, in the peninsula of Sinai. They desired to hinder the Israelites on their way to the Promised Land, and, as far as they could, to destroy all worshippers of the true God. — ¹³ as the leader of the fighting men. — ¹⁴ in intercessory prayer. — ¹⁵ a leading representative of the tribe of Juda.

II. Commentary.

The wood, thrown into the bitter well, by God's command, possessed no natural properties, by which to make the water sweet; therefore, the miracle worked was simply the effect of God's almighty power. In the same way, the stroke, dealt by Moses's rod, did not of itself bring water from the rock: it was the omnipotence of God, which caused that abundant spring to pour from the dry stone. To show that the power came from Him, the Lord God, present in the pillar of cloud, rested on the rock. It was also His almighty will, which summoned the flock of quails, and which rained the Manna from heaven every day (except the Sabbath), during forty years, so that His chosen people might be able to exist in the barren desert.

Goodness and Patience of God. Almighty God was marvelously good and patient with the unbelieving Israelites. He dwelt in their midst in a visible way; He protected them from the heat of the sun by the pillar of cloud; He forgave them their repeated murmurings; He was always showering fresh benefits on them, and defending them against their enemies.

Sins against religion. The Israelites were an ungrateful, carnal people. They cared more for good food and drink than for their liberty and the Promised Land. Though Almighty God worked such great miracles for them, and dwelt in their midst in the pillar of cloud, they were always murmuring against Moses and reproaching him. Their reproaches and ingratitude were, indirectly, offences against God, for Moses was but carrying out His commands. The Israelites sinned against the First Commandment by their ingratitude, want of confidence, and murmurings against the decrees of God.

The power of prayer. Moses raised, not only his hands, but also his heart to God. "The continual prayer of a just man availeth much" (James 5, 16). It was not Josue's valour, but Moses's prayers, which overcame the enemy. Raise your heart with your hands to heaven, when you pray. Like Moses, the priest at the altar prays with outstretched, upraised hands.

Helping ourselves. The Israelites did not depend only on the prayers of Moses; they exerted themselves, and defended

themselves as best they could. In all our times of danger and necessity, we ought to do the same: do what we can for ourselves, and pray to God.

Unappreciated gifts of God. Daily bread to eat, and good water to drink are very great boons. We only learn to prize them, when we have to go without them.

The wood, which made the waters sweet, is a type of the Cross of Jesus Christ. His Cross makes sweet to us all that is bitter and distasteful. Firstly, it gives us the grace to be patient, and, secondly, it teaches us to bear all sufferings cheerfully, for love of Him, who suffered so much for us.

The Manna is, as our Lord Himself declared (New. Test. XXXIV), a type of the Blessed Sacrament. It came daily from heaven to give strength to the Israelites for their journey, and was sweet to the taste. Our Lord, in the Blessed Sacrament, comes from heaven, and gives Himself to us to nourish our souls on their journey to heaven, through the wilderness of this life; and He is a sweet and life-giving food to those who love Him. The Church says in the Litany of the Blessed Sacrament: Thou hast given them bread from heaven, containing in itself all sweetness.

The water, flowing from the rock, is (according to 1 Cor. 10, 24) a type of the stream of divine grace, which, proceeding from our Saviour, Who was pierced for us, flows down on the languishing souls of men (compare what our Lord says about the living water, New Test. XVI). "If any man thirst, let him come to Me and drink," said our Divine Saviour (John 7, 37).

Moses, praying on the mountain with outstretched arms, is a type of our Lord, Who was nailed with outstretched arms on to the Cross on Calvary, and prayed for the salvation of the world.

The victory of God's chosen people over the heathen Amalekites is a type of the victory of the Church militant over her enemies, a victory, won by the spiritual weapons of virtue and prayer.

III. Application.

He who wishes to reach the promised land of heaven must suffer and deny himself. He must renounce his bad desires, and patiently bear trials for love of God. He must fight against the enemies of his soul, and all temptations to evil. We must fight, endure and suffer in this world, and we must do so from our youth upwards. Ask yourself, what you have done hitherto. Deny yourself voluntarily something in the way of food and drink. Do not complain, if anything hurts you, but rather suffer it in silence, and

offer your pain to your crucified Saviour. Suppress at once all movements of anger, pride, envy, or sinful curiosity.

We must not only fight: we must also pray, to be enabled to overcome the enemy of our souls. Say to-day a prayer in honour of the Five Wounds of our Lord, or else, say a decade of the sorrowful mysteries of the rosary, to obtain the grace to overcome yourself.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

GOD GIVES THE TEN COMMANDMENTS ON MOUNT SINAI.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

IN the third month¹ after their departure from Egypt, the Israelites came to Mount Sinai², where they rested and pitched their tents. Moses ascended the mountain, and God appeared to him there. He commanded him to go down to the people, and remind them of the wonders He had wrought in their behalf. He told him, moreover, to announce to them that, if they would keep His law, they should continue to be His chosen people³.

Moses went down from the mountain, and related to the people what God had said. They all cried out with one voice: "All that the Lord hath spoken we will do." Then, Moses went up again to the mountain, and the Lord told him that all the people should sanctify and purify themselves from all defilement, that might render them unfit to appear in His presence, and to come, on the third day⁴, to the mountain; but that barriers⁵ must be placed around it, so that they might not approach too near and die.

¹ They had left Egypt on the fifteenth day of the first month; and now it was the third day of the third month, or forty-eight days since their departure. — ² See map. A distinction must be drawn between Sinai in its larger sense, and Sinai in its particular sense, for all the mountains, in that part of Arabia, are, in the wider sense, known as Sinai. In this chain there are two peaks; one is Horeb, and the other is known as Sinai in the more particular sense of the word. It was in front of this latter mountain that the Israelites encamped. It is 7363 feet high, and rises perpendicularly from a large plateau to a height of 2000 feet. From this plateau the Israelites

could see everything, which took place on the mountain. — ³ God renewed with all the people the covenant, which He had made with their forefather Abraham (Chapt. IX). — ⁴ They were to purify themselves inwardly by penance, as well as outwardly by ablutions, because the Most Holy was going to manifest Himself to them. — ⁵ or boundaries, probably marked by stakes, which were not to be passed.

The third morning being come, there was thunder and lightning around the mountain, and a thick cloud covered its top. Smoke, mixed with fire ⁶, was seen to ascend, the mountain rocked and trembled ⁷, while a trumpet ⁸ sounded very loud, and the people below on the plain feared exceedingly. Then was heard the voice of the Lord, speaking from the cloud, that covered the mountain, saying:

- I. I am the Lord thy God. Thou shalt not have strange gods before Me. Thou shalt not make to thyself a graven thing; nor the likeness of anything; thou shalt not adore them, nor serve them.
- II. Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain ⁹.
- III. Remember that thou keep holy the Sabbath-day.
- IV. Honour thy father and thy mother, that thou mayest be long lived upon the land, which the Lord thy God will give thee.
- V. Thou shalt not kill.
- VI. Thou shalt not commit adultery.
- VII. Thou shalt not steal.
- VIII. Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour.
- IX. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife.
- X. Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's goods.

The people, trembling and afraid at the foot of the mountain, cried out to Moses: "Speak thou to us, and we will hear; let not the Lord speak to us, lest we die." ¹⁰ Moses told them that the Lord had come down to instil fear into their hearts, that they might not sin.

⁶ When God spoke to Moses the first time, He appeared to him in the midst of flames, in the burning bush. — ⁷ There was an earthquake. — ⁸ with a long sound. — ⁹ i. e. not for an unnecessary purpose. — ¹⁰ of terror.

And the people stood afar off, but Moses went into the dark cloud¹¹, and the Lord gave him further laws¹², which he wrote down and explained to the people. They answered with one voice: "We will do all the words of the Lord, which He hath spoken." Moses raised an altar at the foot of the mountain, and offered a holocaust to the Lord. And, taking the blood of the victim, he sprinkled the people with it, saying: "This is the blood of the covenant¹³, which the Lord hath made with you, concerning all these words."

As the Old Covenant, or Testament, was consecrated by the sprinkling of the blood of animals, so the New Testament was ratified and sealed by the Blood of the Son of God, Who said: "This is My Blood of the New Testament."

¹¹ In which God was (Ex. 20, 21). — ¹² laws, relating to the moral life of the people, and also laws, in further explanation of the Ten Commandments. Moses, in the name of God, formally and solemnly ratified His covenant with the people, after they had promised obedience to His law, and sealed it with the blood of a sacrifice. — ¹³ i. e. this blood is for the ratification and sealing of the covenant.

II. Commentary.

The Holiness of God. God, Who wills what is good, and abhors what is evil, revealed His will to man by His holy Commandments, so that they might avoid what was evil, and do what was right. And because He is holy, He desired the Israelites to sanctify themselves and prepare themselves by penance for His manifestation of Himself to them.

The fearful Majesty of God. The tremendous signs, under which God manifested Himself, were intended to convince the people of His greatness and majesty, and inspire them with a wholesome fear of breaking His Commandments. Therefore, Moses said to them: "The Lord is come that you may fear Him and not sin." These tokens of the presence of God are typical of His attributes. The cloud and the smoke signified that God is incomprehensible, and cannot be gazed at by mortal eyes. The crashing of the thunder and the terrible blast of the trumpets revealed God's might and majesty. The lightning and the flames pointed to God's holiness and avenging justice. The quaking of the mountain

signified the fearful and unapproachable majesty of God, before which the very angels tremble. No wonder that these tokens of the presence of God filled the Israelites with fear and awe. When the Lord God Himself spoke the Ten Commandments, they were filled with such consuming fear that they nearly fainted away, and said to Moses: "Speak thou to us &c." They felt that they must die, if God spoke to them in that way. How terrible is the majesty of God! The Israelites did not see Him; they only saw the signs of His presence, and heard His voice, and yet, they nearly died of terror. Fear the just God, and keep His Commandments.

The Ten Commandments and the Natural Law. The Ten Commandments were but the expression of that natural law, which God has written in every man's heart, and which every man can know, if he listens to the voice of reason and conscience. Therefore, the Ten Commandments apply to all men and all times: and, for this reason, God wrote them on stone to signify that they are as durable as stone, and are to last for all ages. We Christians ought to observe the Commandments even more perfectly than was expected of the Israelites, for our Lord has said: "Think not that I am come to destroy the law or the prophets. I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil" (New Test. XXI).

The contents of the Ten Commandments are fully explained in the catechism, so I will only draw your attention here to their connexion with each other, and to their general tenor. The first three say to us, "Thou shalt worship God; thou shalt honour and keep holy His name; thou shalt respect and keep holy His day." The fourth Commandment is a transition from one division to the other. The next four protect our most valuable possessions, and forbid any injury to life, innocence, property and honour. The last two forbid evil desires, because they corrupt the heart and lead to evil deeds.

The Ten Commandments are a benefit to mankind. God gave them to us out of love and for our good, or, in other words, for our temporal welfare and our eternal salvation. How would the world fare, if murder, rapine, robbery and

defamation of character were not forbidden! Nobody would be sure of either life or property. There would be an end to all order and obedience in family-life; evil and lawlessness would reign triumphantly; men would live like wild beasts in accordance with their savage lusts, and hunt down and devour each other. The Ten Commandments were, therefore, given to us for our good; that peace and order might reign among men, in family, society and state, and that we might attain to everlasting happiness. For this reason, he who does not observe the Ten Commandments, is not only an enemy to God, but an enemy to mankind and to his own self.

The Old Covenant and the New. The Old Covenant was made through Moses, the New through Jesus Christ. The Old Covenant was made with only one nation; the New with all mankind. The Old Covenant was made, to last for a limited time; the New will last to the end of time. The Old Covenant was sealed with the blood of victims; the New with the Blood of God made Man ("This is My Blood of the New Testament"; New Test. LXV). In the Old Testament, severe laws were made, but the power of observing them was not given. The New Testament has not only its own holy laws, but abundant grace is given, by which to observe them; and the New Covenant is, therefore, called the Covenant of grace.

The Ten Commandments and the other laws of the Old Testament were a preparation for Jesus Christ (Gal. 3, 24). The Jews could not perfectly observe those laws, which forbade even evil desires; and, feeling this, they came to know their own weakness and sinfulness. They saw that they required divine help to do that which they ought to do, and to be just in the eyes of God. They longed, therefore, for the promised Saviour. But we Christians can, by God's grace, keep all the Commandments, if only we desire to do so, and use the means of grace.

Pentecost. God gave the Ten Commandments fifty days after the departure from Egypt. In commemoration of this, the Jews always kept the feast of Pentecost fifty days after the Pasch (Old Test. XXXIX). The Christian Pentecost is also kept fifty days after Easter, because, on that day, God the Holy Ghost descended from heaven, and inscribed the law of love on the hearts of the faithful.

The first day of Pentecost in the Old Testament is a type of the first day of Pentecost in the New Testament. On the former, the

†mountain shook; on the latter, the house, in which were the apostles. On the one, were thunders and storm; on the other, the rushing as of a mighty wind. On the former, flames appeared; on the latter, tongues of fire. On the one, God came down to give the Commandments; on the other, God the Holy Ghost came down to bring priceless graces for the observance of the Commandments.

No more barriers. The boundaries, set round the mountain, were meant to say to the Israelites: "You are not worthy on account of your sins to approach the Lord." Now, the barriers, which separate man from God, are removed by Jesus Christ. We dare now approach God. We dare receive Him into our very hearts, and unite ourselves to Him in the closest manner.

III. Application.

Thank God that He has, by the Ten Commandments, shown you the road to heaven. Take the trouble to learn the meaning of the Commandments thoroughly. Ask yourself, which Commandment you have most sinned against, and pray to the Holy Ghost for the gift of holy fear.

The Israelites had to prepare themselves for the hearing of God's voice, by the sanctification of their senses. How much more ought we to prepare ourselves for receiving God into our hearts in Holy Communion.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE GOLDEN CALF.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

MOSES again ascended the mountain, and remained there forty days and forty nights conversing with God¹. And, when God had finished speaking with Moses, He gave him two tables of stone, on which were written the Ten Commandments². Now the people, seeing that Moses did not come down from the mountain as soon as they expected³, rose up against Aaron and besought him, saying: "Make us gods, that may go before us. For, as to this Moses, the man that brought us out of the land of Egypt, we know not what has befallen him."

Hoping to dissuade them from their impious project, Aaron replied: "Take the golden ear-rings from the ears of your wives, and your sons and daughters, and bring them to me."



Contrary to all expectation⁴, they brought their rings to Aaron, who, fearing to offer resistance, accepted them, and made a molten calf⁵, and built an altar. And the people exclaimed: "These are thy gods, O Israel, that have brought thee out of the land of Egypt." Next morning they offered holocausts and peace-victims, and began to eat and drink and to dance, after the manner of the Egyptians.

¹ Moses passed the forty days and forty nights without food, and in prayer and contemplation, and was instructed by God about the making of the tabernacle and the worship of God. — ² The tables of the Commandments were the document of the Covenant. On the first table were written the first three Commandments, which teach us our duty towards God. On the second were the seven others, which relate to our duty towards our neighbour. — ³ They believed that some misfortune had befallen Moses, and that God would now no longer be with them. This, however, was not the real cause of their idolatry, the plea of his absence was only an excuse. The real causes were the weakness of their faith and their sensuality, which made them crave for the low and dissolute pleasures of idolatry. — ⁴ Aaron had reckoned that they would rather give up their project than sacrifice their ornaments and treasures. However, their craving for idolatry proved to be stronger than their vanity or avarice. —

⁵ They insisted on a calf being made in imitation of the Egyptian worship of Apis. The gold was melted on the fire, and then cast into a mould.

Meanwhile Moses came down from the mountain with the two tables of stone, whereon God Himself had written His Commandments. When he heard the shouts of the people, and saw them dance before the golden calf, he dashed the tables to the ground and broke them ⁶ at the foot of the mount. Then, laying hold of the calf, he burnt it and beat it to powder ⁷.

He severely rebuked Aaron for yielding to the wicked desires of the people. Then, standing in the gate of the camp, he said: "If any man be on the Lord's side, let him join with me." And all the sons of Levi ⁸ gathered around him. Then, Moses ordered them to take their swords, go through the camp, and slay every man, whom they found practising idolatry. They did as they were commanded, and about twenty-three thousand men were put to death that day.

⁶ The people, having broken their covenant with God, Moses broke the words of the covenant. He meant also to show by this action that the people had proved themselves unworthy of the benefits of the law. — ⁷ He ground it into gold dust. He did this to make the people understand the utter nothingness of idols, and the folly of worshipping them. — ⁸ the descendants of Jacob's son Levi. Most of the tribe of Levi had refrained from the worship of the golden calf.

Next day, Moses again ascended the mountain, and earnestly entreated the Lord for His ungrateful people. But the Lord said: "Let me alone that I may destroy them." Still Moses insisted, saying: "I beseech Thee, this people hath sinned: either forgive them this trespass, or, if Thou do not, strike me out of the book that Thou hast written." ⁹

The Lord heard his prayer, and ordered him to cut two other tables of stone. Moses obeyed, and on those tables the Lord again wrote the Ten Commandments. But, when Moses came down from the mountain with the tables in his hands, his face was so radiant ¹⁰ with glory that the Israelites were afraid to come near; hence he veiled his face, whenever he spoke to the people. From this terrible punishment, inflicted upon the Israelites, we may learn what a fearful thing it is to offend God. Moses, the mediator of the Old Testament, is a figure of Jesus Christ, the Mediator of the New Testament,

The prayer of Moses for his people teaches us in a striking manner that the intercession of the saints has great power to avert the chastisements of God.

⁹ The book, in which are written the names of the just, and heirs to heaven. By this forcible language Moses wished to say: "I (if I can do so without sin) will renounce eternal life rather than that this whole people should perish." — ¹⁰ with a wonderful, supernatural brilliancy. Therefore, Moses is always drawn with two rays of light on his brow (see pictures pp. 167. 171).

II. Commentary.

The Mercy of God. The people of Israel had sinned horribly against God by their idolatry, and yet, at Moses's intercession, He forgave them.

Idolatry. The weak people were most ungrateful and faithless to God. The Lord had done such great things for them! Only forty days before, they had, full of holy fear, heard His voice and had repeatedly promised obedience to His Commandments; and yet, now they transgressed the first and most important of them, and forsook Him to worship idols. St. Paul calls lust and covetousness idolatry. Whenever a man loves anything more than he loves God, he is guilty of idolatry.

Pleasure-seeking and sensuality lead to many sins, and, finally, to unbelief and impiety.

Fear of man. Aaron sinned grievously. It was from fear of man, fear for his life, that he sinned. He ought to have died rather than assist the people in their terrible sin.

Righteous anger. The anger of Moses was not sinful anger; it was, rather, a holy zeal for God's honour, and the good of the people. He who loves God, cannot feel indifferent when he sees Him being offended; and he who really loves his neighbour, must be pained when he sees him walking on the road to hell. We ought, therefore, to prevent sin, whenever we can; punish it, when we have the right to do so; and pray zealously for the conversion of sinners.

Intercession for sinners is pleasing to God. We can see this by the way in which God forgave the people their great sin, when Moses interceded for them.

Love of our neighbour. Moses's love for his people was truly wonderful. He even offered to sacrifice himself that they might be spared, and not cast off by God. He sought neither his own honour nor advantage, but only the good of his people.

Moses, the eighth type of Jesus Christ. Through Moses God instituted the Old Law, on which account he is called the mediator of the Old Law. As such, Moses was a striking type of Jesus Christ, Who instituted the New Law. Moses, as a child, was condemned to death by a cruel king, and was saved in a wonderful way: Jesus Christ was condemned by Herod, and also wonderfully saved. Moses forsook the king's court so as to help his persecuted brethren: the Son of God left the glory of heaven to save us sinners. Moses prepared himself in the desert for his vocation, he freed his people from slavery, and proved his divine mission by great miracles: Jesus Christ proved by still greater miracles that he was the only begotten Son of God. Moses was the advocate of his people: Jesus was our advocate with His Father on the Cross, and is eternally so in heaven. Moses was the law-giver of his people and announced to them the word of God: Jesus Christ is the supreme law-giver, and not only announced God's word, but is Himself the Eternal Word made flesh. Moses was the leader of the people to the Promised Land: Jesus is our leader on our road to heaven.

The fruits of prayer. After Moses had fasted and prayed a second forty days on the mountain, his countenance was glorified, and heavenly rays shone forth from it. This shows us that fervent prayer and communion with God ennoble a man, purify his heart and mind, and make him heavenly minded. The saints of the Old and the New Testament became holy by dint of fervent prayer and contemplation.

III. Application.

I am sure you detest the ingratitude and faithlessness of the Israelites. But, look into your own heart and search your own conscience to see, whether you too have not been ungrateful and faithless. What did you promise, when you were baptized, and when you renewed your baptismal vows, and every time that you have been to confession? Have you kept your promises? Have you never committed a mortal

sin? Do you not know that mortal sin is an execrable ingratitude towards your loving Redeemer? Just think how weak and wavering you are! So, do not trust in yourself, but pray humbly for God's grace, and especially for the grace of perseverance.

Moses spent forty days in prayer, and yet, was not weary, for prayer was his joy, his comfort and his strength. All the saints of both the Old and New Testament have prayed willingly. How is it with you? We can learn to pray only by means of prayer. In this, as in other things, "practice makes perfect". Never neglect your prayers, and try to be very recollected and devout in the service of God. Put yourself in the presence of God several times each day, and thus you will learn how to pray well, and to take pleasure in prayer.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

THE MAKING OF THE TABERNACLE.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

HITHERTO the Israelites had no fixed place of worship, nor, properly speaking, any priesthood. Their patriarchs had offered sacrifice to God; now in one place, now in another. In later times, the heads of families had exercised the priestly functions; but this state of things was no longer to exist. Moses, while conversing with the Lord on the mountain¹, had received from Him the clearest and most definite directions, regarding divine worship, with all the ceremonies, that were to accompany it.

Moses, therefore, built² a shrine, or Tabernacle, that could be taken apart and carried from place to place³. It was a portable tabernacle, or church, as we would call it, and well suited to the wandering life of the children of Israel. It was made of the most precious wood. Its length was thirty, its breadth ten, and its height also ten cubits. The boards were overlaid with plates of gold, and furnished with sockets of silver. It was divided into two parts: the fore part, being larger, was called the Sanctuary; the further part, being smaller, was called the Holy of Holies.

¹ The first time (Chapt. XXXVII). — ² The people brought Moses gold, silver, precious stones, and costly stuffs, with which to make the Tabernacle, sacred vessels &c. &c. They brought so much to him that, at last, Moses had to announce to them that he could receive no further gifts. They wished, by this generosity, to make reparation for their act of idolatry, and show their gratitude for the benefits they had received. — ³ It could be partially taken to pieces, and carried. This had to be done, because the Israelites had no fixed dwelling place, and were always wandering about.

On the inside, he covered the roof and the walls with rich tapestry, and on the outside with skins and furs. Moreover, to the ceiling of the Holy of Holies, as also to its inner walls, he fastened a most precious weaving in very brilliant colours, adorned with an embroidery of cherubim⁴ and palms and flowers. At the entrance of the Sanctuary was hung a richly embroidered curtain⁵; and one, more costly still, separated the Sanctuary from the Holy of Holies. In the Holy of Holies he placed the Ark⁶ of the Covenant, which was covered with gold within and without. At its four corners, on the outside, were attached rings of gold, through which bars, overlaid with gold, were passed, whereby to carry the Ark.

In the Ark he put the tables of the Law. As these tables, on which the Ten Commandments were written, contained the chief heads of the Old Covenant, the Ark itself was called the Ark of the Covenant. Later on, there was placed in the Ark, also, a vase filled with Manna, and the rod of Aaron. He then placed over the Ark a cover, or lid, of the purest gold, called the Propitiatory, at the ends of which stood two cherubim of beaten gold, looking at each other, and spreading their wings so as to overshadow the Propitiatory⁷.

⁴ The second of the nine choirs of angels. — ⁵ a hanging, on which designs were skilfully woven. — ⁶ a chest. — ⁷ See picture.

In the Sanctuary was a table, overlaid with gold, on which were every day placed the loaves of Proposition, made of the finest flour, and unleavened⁸, together with a golden cup, filled with wine. On this table also stood the seven-branched candlestick⁹, on which were burning, night and

day, seven flames, fed by the purest oil¹⁰. Before it stood an altar of incense, whereon the richest spices fumed unceasingly¹¹. Moses made a court in front of and around the Tabernacle, for the gathering of the people¹²; and there he erected the altar of holocausts, of brass, and also a large brazen Laver for the priests¹³.

When all was completed according to God's command, Moses poured a sacred oil on the Tabernacle, and on all it



contained; and then, a cloud¹⁴ covered the Ark of the covenant, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle, and rested between the two cherubim. As often as Moses had occasion to consult the Lord, he received an answer of the Lord from the Propitiatory of the Holy of Holies. As the Tabernacle was divided

into two parts, so our churches have two parts: one for the priests, called the sanctuary, and another for the faithful, called the body of the church. Hence the Tabernacle was a pattern for our Christian churches.

⁸ These loaves were made in the form of thin cakes. They were placed before the Holy of Holies as a standing offering on the part of the twelve tribes, to implore the Lord to look favourably on them. For this reason, there were twelve loaves, six on each dish. — ⁹ This candlestick was made of pure gold, and was of a considerable weight. — ¹⁰ The candlestick is shown, standing near the altar of incense,

in the picture Chapt. I New Test. — ¹¹ incense and other sweet smelling gums. — ¹² The people were allowed to enter only the court. Priests alone might enter the Sanctuary. — ¹³ The priests, under pain of death, had to wash their feet and hands there, as often as they offered sacrifice or entered the Sanctuary. — ¹⁴ in which God was present.

II. Commentary.

The immediate meaning of the building of the Tabernacle. The Ark of the Covenant, in which were kept the two tables of the Law, was more costly than anything else in the Tabernacle. By it the Israelites were to be constantly reminded of the covenant, made with God, as to the strict observance of the Commandments. The Manna, which was also deposited in the Ark, was to remind them of God's loving guidance and preservation of them, and move them to love and trust Him. As cherubim kept guard over Paradise, so they now watched over the Ark of the Covenant; and, at the same time, they reminded the people that they should worship God, and serve Him as willingly as do the angels in heaven. The golden candlestick with its lights, always burning, was an emblem of faith in the true God, and admonished the Israelites to live according to that faith, to avoid the works of darkness, and walk in God's presence. The Laver, and the strict laws, regarding ablutions, were to remind the priests that they ought to approach the holy service of God with clean hearts. The never ceasing smoke, ascending from the altar of incense, bade the people to lift up their hearts to God, and send up constant prayers, like incense, to heaven. The loaves of the Proposition were a perpetual exhortation to be grateful to God, from Whom come all good gifts for our souls as well as our bodies. The curtain, which shut off the Holy of Holies, and through which even the High Priest dared pass only once a year, signified "that the way into the holies was not yet made manifest" (Hebr. 9, 8). As God was present in the pillar of cloud, that rested on the Ark, so the Tabernacle was God's dwelling in the midst of His people.

Its typical meaning. "The Tabernacle is a parable of the time present" (i. e. the Christian era), writes St. Paul. It

foreshadowed the Church of the New Testament and its houses of God. As there was only one Tabernacle, so is there only one true Church; but as this Church is Catholic, or universal, there are in it many houses of God, or churches. The pillar of cloud, resting on the Ark, is the type of the presence of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, in the Catholic tabernacles, in which is reserved no mere earthly manna, but the living bread, which came down from heaven. In the Catholic Church, the altar of holocausts is the Cross, and the table of Proposition the altar, on which the holy mass is daily offered. The altar of incense is the prayer, constantly rising to heaven, and the golden candlestick the gospel, which is preached and expounded in our churches. The seven lights are the seven Sacraments, which are there dispensed, and the Laver is the font and the confessional, where we are cleansed from our sins — or even the stoup of holy water, by the devout use of which venial sins are remitted. You can see, therefore, that in many respects the Tabernacle was a type, which finds its perfect fulfilment in our churches; and that even the poorest village-chapel is holier than was the Tabernacle of the Old Covenant.

God's Goodness to the Israelites was exceeding great, for He deigned to dwell in their midst, in a visible way in the pillar of cloud. But immeasurably greater is God's love and condescension to us, for His Divine Son made Man dwells with us not only in one place, but in thousands of different churches and chapels, under the appearance of bread, blesses us, offers Himself up for us, and feeds our souls with the bread from heaven, that contains within itself all sweetness.

The veneration of images. By God's command Moses had figures of cherubim embroidered on the hangings of the Sanctuary, and placed golden cherubim on the Ark of the Covenant. These images served for the edification of the Israelites, and were much honoured by them. It is evident, therefore, that it is pleasing to God that we should venerate the images of the angels and saints.

Mary is called, in the Litany of Loreto, *the Ark of the Covenant*, because she is the Mother of Jesus Christ, Who instituted the New Covenant.

III. Application.

We should be zealous for the beauty of the house of God. "I have loved, O Lord, the beauty of Thy house, and the place, where Thy glory dwelleth" (Ps. 25, 8). Gladly visit the church; and beware of desecrating it. Be careful how you behave in it, and how you use holy water &c.

CHAPTER XXXIX.

LAWS REGULATING DIVINE WORSHIP.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

BY God's command Moses now prescribed what sacrifices were to be offered, together with the manner of offering them, and the times when they were to be offered. Some of these sacrifices were bloody, others unbloody. The former consisted of sheep, goats and oxen¹; the latter of flour, fruits, oil and wine². When the thing offered was wholly consumed on the altar, it was called a holocaust or whole burnt offering, and represented the highest act of adoration³. But, when only the fat, as the most delicate part, was burned, and the rest eaten, it was called either a sacrifice of thanksgiving for benefits received, or a sacrifice of expiation for sins committed⁴.



¹ He who offered the sacrifice, laid his hand on the head of the victim, and then killed it. He then either poured the blood on to the altar, or sprinkled the people with it. This pouring of the blood on the altar was the most important part of the sacrifice, for, by the shedding of its blood, the life of the victim was offered. — ² For this reason they were called meat-offerings. All these offerings, even the incense, were sprinkled with salt, which, being a preservative against corruption, is a type of purity. It was also a token of friendship and in this case of friendship with God; wherefore it was called the salt of the covenant. Neither leaven nor honey might be presented

on the altar, for they, being conducive to fermentation or corruption, were regarded as figures of sin. — ³ Every morning and every evening, a one year old lamb was offered as a holocaust. This was called the perpetual sacrifice. — ⁴ or sin-offering. In conjunction with these sacrifices, there was obligatory at least a general confession of the sins committed. For particular sins special sin-offerings were commanded and, before such could be offered, the offender had to confess the sin explicitly to the priest. No Israelite, who had transgressed the law in a grave matter, was allowed, under pain of death, to offer either a burnt offering or a peace-offering, unless he had first made a sin-offering, and confessed his sin.

Moses also instituted the feasts of the Lord; for the Lord had told him to establish, first, the Feast of the Pasch, or Passover, in memory of the paschal lamb, eaten by the children of Israel on the night when the first-born of the Egyptians were slain, and also in memory of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage. For seven days they were to eat unleavened bread while celebrating that feast ⁵.

Secondly, they were to keep holy, seven weeks after, the Feast of Pentecost, in remembrance of the law, given them on Mount Sinai. On that day, they were to bring the first-fruits of their harvest ⁶ as an offering to the Lord. Thirdly, when the harvest was all gathered in, they were to solemnize the Feast of Tabernacles, during which they were to take branches of trees and build tents ⁷, and dwell in them, so that their descendants might learn how the Lord had made their fathers dwell in tents in the deserts. On these three festivals all the men ⁸ of Israel were to appear before the Lord in the Tabernacle, and later on in the Temple ⁹.

There was also to be a day of expiation ¹⁰, kept as a most solemn fast ¹¹. On that day, the High Priest was to sacrifice a calf in atonement for his own sins, and a he-goat for the sins of the people. After the sacrifice he was to raise the veil, and enter into the Holy of Holies ¹², taking with him the blood of the victim and the golden censer; he was then to incense the Propitiatory, or cover of the Ark, and to sprinkle it and the front of the Ark with the blood ¹³.

⁵ It was, therefore, also called the Feast of unleavened bread (Chapt. XXXIII). — ⁶ The harvest is much earlier in those countries,

than it is with us. — ⁷ hence the name of Feast of Tabernacles. — ⁸ from twelve years old and upward. Old men, women and children were not bound to appear, but they might take part in the pilgrimage, if they chose. — ⁹ Besides these annual feasts, every seventh year was set apart as a year of the Sabbath or of rest, and every fiftieth year as a year of the Jubilee. In the year of rest, no work of cultivation of the earth was allowed, and everything, that grew naturally on it, was common property; nor could any debts be claimed during the year. The Jubilee-year was also a year of rest from labour, and of exemption for debtors. In that year, moreover, all slaves received their freedom; and possessions, that had been sold, reverted to their first owner without purchase, the reason for this being given by God in these words: "The land shall not be sold for ever: because it is mine, and you are strangers and sojourners with me." By this decree, the impoverishment of individual families and tribes was prevented. — ¹⁰ kept five days before the Feast of Tabernacles. — ¹¹ Every person, with the exception of the sick and children, were bound to observe a strict fast, touching no food till after sunset. They also had to pray, confess their sins, and implore God's mercy. — ¹² This was the only day in the year, on which he entered it. — ¹³ After his return from the Holy of Holies, he took another goat, and, having laid his hands on its head, he confessed the sins of the whole people, and then drove the goat away into the wilderness, laden with the people's sins. This was a typical ceremony, and was meant to indicate that the sins of the people were taken away and lost in the infinitude of God's mercy.

Finally, Moses consecrated Aaron as High Priest, his sons as priests, and the other men of the tribe of Levi as ministers of the Sanctuary¹⁴. He purified Aaron with water¹⁵, and clothed him with divers sacred vestments¹⁶, chief of which was the ephod, a marvellous work of gold and purple and fine linen, the edges of which were ornamented with rich embroidery of gold.

He suspended from his neck the rational, on which were twelve stones, each bearing the name of one of the twelve tribes; he placed upon his head the mitre¹⁷, in the middle of which, in front, was a gold plate, with the inscription: "The Holy of the Lord"¹⁸. Finally, he poured oil upon his head, and consecrated him. After his sons and the Levites had also been consecrated, Aaron advanced to the altar, and, having offered a victim, stretched his hand over the people, and blessed them.



And behold! a fire came forth from the pillar of cloud and consumed the holocaust. Seeing which, the people fell prostrate on the ground, praising the Lord. All the public worship of the Israelites was figurative. The bloody sacrifices signified the bloody Sacrifice of the Cross, which alone truly appeased the divine wrath. The unbloody sacrifices pre-figured the unbloody Sacrifice of the Mass, by which the fruit of the Sacrifice of the Cross is constantly applied to us, and which is, at once, a sacrifice of adoration, of thanksgiving, of prayer, and of expiation. The High Priest was a figure of Jesus Christ, Who, on the Cross, offered Himself to the Eternal Father in a bloody manner, and who daily, at Mass, offers Himself in an unbloody manner at the hands of the priest.

¹⁴ Hitherto the first-born son had been set apart for the service of God, but from henceforward the tribe of Levi was chosen for the priestly office and the service of the Tabernacle. In other words, hitherto priests had been taken from all tribes and all families, but

now, a peculiar priesthood was instituted. The priestly office was hereditary in Aaron's family. The first-born of this family was always to be High Priest, and the other male descendants priests. The other men of the tribe of Levi were to assist the priests in the service of God, and were known by the name of Levites. — ¹⁵ in the brass laver in the outer court. — ¹⁶ namely a white linen tunic, reaching to the ankles (something like the alb worn by our priests), a girdle of many colours and a mitre. The picture on page 190 represents the High Priest in his vestments. Under the breast-plate or rational you see a short vestment. Under this is a purple tunic without sleeves (to which we may compare the chasuble worn by priests when they celebrate Mass), ornamented with embroidered pomegranates and gold bells. Under this again is the long white tunic, the girdle round which, with its tassels, is to be seen. — ¹⁷ of purple. — ¹⁸ which meant that the wearer was a sacred person, consecrated to God.

II. Commentary.

Sacrifice is the highest and most perfect form of worship; therefore, God ordained sacrifices to be the centre of divine worship under the Old Law. What was sacrificed, was given to God, and had to be wholly consumed in His honour. Thus, victims were killed and burnt, wine was poured out, and incense was burnt. These actions were meant to express on the part of him who made the offering some such thought as this: "Thou, O Lord, hast created all things! Everything comes from Thee. To Thee I owe my life and all that I possess! I have, indeed, deserved death at Thy hands, but as Thou dost not require of me my life, I offer to Thee instead the life of this lamb." The bloody sacrifices were sacrifices of expiation, and for this reason the priest laid his hand on the head of the victim, as a token that he laid his sins on it, and sacrificed it as a representative of himself. Therefore, the only animals which could be offered up, were domestic animals, which are useful and valuable to man.

The ends of sacrifice. By sacrifices men were 1. taught that they depended absolutely on God, and owed Him worship and thanksgiving as their supreme Lord; 2. they were roused to a consciousness that they were sinners before God, and owed satisfaction to the divine justice; 3. they were shown that they, of themselves, could not make satisfaction, but required a mediator.

In what lay the efficacy of sacrifice? Could pardon and inward sanctification be obtained through the blood of beasts which, themselves, were not clean, but lay under the curse which Adam's sin had brought on the earth? No! these sacrifices could only effect an outward justice, and a legal purification by which those who offered the sacrifice were made clean in the eyes of the law, and were enabled once more to take part in the public worship of God. But, in so far as these sacrifices were types of the one atoning Sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and pointed to this only source of grace and pardon, they could effect sanctification and pardon, provided he who offered the sacrifice believed in the future Saviour, and repented of his sins. This faith, this hope, and this repentance were stimulated by sacrifice, and in virtue of this intention he received pardon and grace.

The chief significance of the Old Testament sacrifices lay in their being types of the most holy, and world-redeeming Sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The bloody sacrifices were typical of His bloody Sacrifice on the Cross; the unbloody sacrifices were typical of the holy Sacrifice of the Mass; and the meat-offerings, of Holy Communion. All the sacrifices of the Old Law found their fulfilment in the Sacrifice of our Lord, because, firstly, His was a real vicarious sacrifice, and, secondly, it had infinite efficacy to blot out all sin, and win grace for all men. It was a real vicarious sacrifice, for Jesus Christ is truly man, and took the sins of His brethren upon Him. It had infinite efficacy, because Jesus Christ is also true God, and made infinite satisfaction to the divine justice. The Sacrifice of Christ was a true holocaust, because He shed all His Blood, and was consumed by the fire of infinite love in honour of His heavenly Father. It was a sin-offering, in the highest sense of the word, because it took away the sins of the world, and cancelled the debt of man. It was the greatest of peace-offerings, because it reconciled heaven to earth, and brought peace to the world. Since our Lord offered Himself as a Sacrifice, the typical sacrifices of the Old Law have lost all efficacy.

The confession of sins required for sin-offerings is typical of the holy Sacrament of Penance, without recourse to which no sinner dare partake of the "meat-offering" of Holy Communion.

The immediate meaning of the Jewish feasts. The religious feasts of the Jewish people had a double meaning, retrospective and prophetic. The feasts served immediately to remind the people of the wonderful graces and benefits which they had received from God. The Christian feasts, also, are intended to remind us of, and make us grateful for the grace of sanctification and redemption.

The typical meaning of the Jewish feasts. Their significance lies in this that they were types of the Christian feasts, and pointed towards that manifestation of grace which is the foundation of these last. You learnt in Chapters XXXIII and XXXVI the connexion between the Jewish feasts of the Pasch and Pentecost and our Easter and Pentecost. The Feast of Tabernacles corresponds with our Corpus Christi, which is solemnized in the open air, and is a Feast of thanksgiving to God, that Jesus Christ, God made Man, has given Himself to be our Leader through the wilderness of this life, and feeds our souls with the true Bread from heaven. Our great day of expiation is Good Friday, on which day Jesus Christ was crucified outside the walls for the sins of the world. Even as the Jewish High Priest went into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement, to take there the blood of the sacrifice, so Christ, "being come an High Priest of the good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle (i. e. heaven), not made with hand, that is, not of this creation, neither by the blood of goats and of calves, but by His own blood, entered once into the Holies, having obtained eternal redemption" (Hebr. 9, 11. 12). This means that, by His death on Good Friday, Jesus Christ won for us justification, sanctification, and salvation, and then went to heaven, offered the merits of His Passion and Death to His heavenly Father, and won that redemption for us which will last for all eternity. The great year of Jubilee which began with the Day of Atonement, is a beautiful type of the Christian era which will last for ever, and in which

man, by the atoning Death of Jesus Christ, is freed from the slavery of sin and Satan, and is once more made heir of the kingdom of heaven.—The recurring years of rest and jubilee correspond with our years of jubilee in which the Church throws open her treasures of grace, and offers to us indulgences from the temporal punishment of sin, so that we may be cleansed from all guilt, and made partakers of the heavenly inheritance.

A retrospect. If we look back to this Chapter and to the last, we see that the Tabernacle and its institution, the sacred persons, the sacrifices and feasts have one and all a typical meaning; and, furthermore, that all these types find their fulfilment in the Catholic Church, and in her alone; for she alone has priest and High Priest, altar and sacrifice. It follows then that the Catholic Church alone is the true Church, founded by God, and foreshadowed in the Old Testament.

The festal assemblies and pilgrimages of the people of Israel had a very beneficial effect. They served, firstly, to preserve and increase the belief in the true God, and thus to keep the people from idolatry. Secondly, they served to foster unity and a common feeling among the people, who came to look upon themselves as all members of one body, confessors of the same faith, and heirs of the same promises.

Two significant facts. The entrance of the High Priest into the Holy of Holies, and his blood-offering there on the Day of Atonement, signified that reconciliation with God can only proceed from His throne; and that one day the Redeemer would rend asunder the veil of separation and open the way into the Holy of Holies. Secondly, it was foreshown that even as the goat which was the sin-offering of the people had to be burnt outside the camp, so Jesus Christ, the Lamb of God, laden with the sins of the whole world, would be crucified outside the city. He is the great, the true atoning Sacrifice to Whom all the ceremonies of the Day of Atonement pointed.

Reward of faithfulness. The tribe of Levi was smaller than the others, but it had become less infected with idolatry; and on account of its faithfulness, God chose it for His special service.

The High Priest was the spiritual head of the people, the visible representative of God, and the mediator between God and the people. He had the privilege of entering the Holy of Holies once a year; and, later on, of anointing the kings.

The Priests had the right and the duty to offer sacrifice, to enter the Sanctuary, to keep burning the lights of the seven branched candlestick and the sacred fire for the burnt offerings, to bless the people, and pray for them, and instruct them in the law.

The Levites were the assistants of the priests. They might not enter the Sanctuary, but had the care of the Tabernacle, and, later on, of the Temple. They assisted with the sacrifices, sacred canticles, and the instruction of the people, and purified the sacred vessels.

The Priests were to be holy. "Let them, therefore, be holy, because I am holy", said the Lord (Lev. 21, 8). Whenever they had any service to perform in the Sanctuary, they had, under pain of death, to keep themselves away from any defilement or intoxicating drink. This purity of life was signified by their white tunic; and purity of intention, by the white mitre.

The High Priest was to be especially distinguished for piety and virtue. The inscription on the gold plate on his mitre meant that he belonged entirely to God, and that his thoughts were to be constantly fixed on Him. The breast-plate, on which were inscribed the names of the twelve tribes, told that he was to bear the people lovingly in his heart, and be careful for their welfare. The bells on his upper tunic, which sounded at each step he took, reminded him that, by word and deed, he had to be a witness to the true faith.

Jesus, the Anointed. It was only when the priesthood was first instituted that priests were anointed; later on, this was not done. But every High Priest was anointed when he entered on his office, and every High Priest was called the Anointed. Jesus Christ, being the great and eternal High Priest Who always liveth to make intercession for us (Hebr. 7, 25), is especially called "Christ", or the Anointed.

The priesthood of the Old Covenant, a type of the priesthood of the New Covenant. As there is a gradation in the former, so is there in the latter. There are the Pope, bishops, priests and the orders below them, especially the Deacons who are also called Levites. As in the Old Testament there was only one High Priest, so the Christian Church has only

one High Priest, the Pope, who is the visible representative of our invisible High Priest, Jesus Christ. And even as the High Priest of the Old Testament was called "Holy of the Lord", so do we call the Pope "Holy Father", because he fills the holiest office on earth.

The Christian priesthood is far higher than the Jewish priesthood. The latter was propagated by descent of the body, the former is perpetuated by a spiritual descent, or succession, by means of Holy Order, which is one of the seven sacraments. The Jewish priests could only offer typical sacrifices: Christian priests offer up the true Lamb of God Who taketh away the sins of the world. The former partook of earthly meat-offerings; the latter receive the priceless Flesh and Blood of the Divine Saviour. The Jewish priests prayed for the people: the Christian priests remember them daily in the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and also, except in Masses for the dead, give their blessing to the faithful.

Holy virgins, as well as the Levites, were employed in the service of the Tabernacle and, later on, of the Temple. They attended to the linen &c., and served the Lord with prayer and fasting. Tradition tells us that Mary, the Mother of God, was dedicated to the service of the Temple at a very early age.

III. Application.

Thank God for the holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and assist regularly and devoutly at it. There you can receive priceless gifts, for the Sacrifice of Jesus Christ is the source of all grace.

Keep the Feasts of the Church, devoutly contemplating the sacred mysteries of our redemption, and avoid extravagant amusements on those days: "Rejoice in the Lord" (Phil. 4, 4).

Have great reverence for the priesthood. Priests are the "ministers of Christ and the dispensers of the mysteries of God" (1 Cor. 4, 1). We should always pray that there may be good priests in the Church.

CHAPTER XL.

THE SPIES.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

IN the second year after their departure from Egypt, the Israelites set out from Mount Sinai¹, and pursued their march to the desert of Pharan². Thence Moses sent twelve men, one of every tribe, to explore the Land of Chanaan.

He said to them: "Go and view the land, whether it be good or bad; and the people, whether they be strong or weak; and the cities, whether they be walled or without walls." So the men went out and viewed the land, entering at the south side and arriving at Hebron. Thence they proceeded as far as the torrent of grapes. Here they cut off a branch with its cluster of grapes, and the men carried it upon a pole³. After forty days they returned, bringing with them figs, grapes, and other rich fruits, as specimens of what the land produced.

They told Moses and all the people that the Land of Chanaan was good, flowing with milk and honey, as might be



seen by these fruits; but that it would be very difficult to conquer that country, as the men were large and strong, and the cities surrounded by walls. They added: "There we saw certain monsters of the sons of Enac, of the giant kind, in comparison of whom we

seemed like locusts."⁴ Then the people, losing courage and confidence in God⁵, began to murmur against Moses and Aaron, wishing that they had died in Egypt, or in the desert. They exclaimed: "Let us appoint a captain and return to Egypt!"

In vain did Caleb and Josue, who were of the number of the spies, or explorers, endeavour to appease the anger of the multitude, saying that the Land of Chanaan was very good, and that, if the men of that country were strong, the Lord would fight for the children of Israel. But the people would not listen to reason. They threatened to put Josue and Caleb to death⁶.

¹ After they had passed a year in the neighbourhood of Mount Sinai. — ² The pillar of cloud moved on, and the Israelites followed

it. They stopped at Cades (see map). They could now have marched straight into Chanaan, but as the people were so timid, and trusted so little in God, it was first necessary to send some spies to find out whether the inhabitants were strong and numerous, and whether the cities were fortified &c. Moses chose a leading man out of each tribe, therefore, twelve in all, and sent them into Chanaan. — ³ At this present time there grow bunches of grapes in those parts 24 inches long and weighing 12 lbs. — ⁴ This was evidently an exaggeration, in which Josue and Caleb took no part. — ⁵ and felt quite convinced that they would never be able to conquer the country. — ⁶ to stone them. They wished to choose another leader instead of Moses, who would take them back to Egypt.

Then the glory of the Lord appeared over the Ark, and God said to Moses: "How long will this people detract Me?⁷ How long will they not believe Me for all the signs that I have wrought before them? I will strike them, therefore, with pestilence, and consume them." Moses interceded for the people, saying: "Forgive, I beseech Thee, the sin of the people, according to the greatness of Thy mercy."

The Lord answered: "I have forgiven, according to thy word. But yet, all the men that have seen the signs that I have done in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have tempted me now ten times, shall not see the land. You shall wander forty years⁸ in the desert, and faint away and die in the desert; but your children shall possess the land."⁹

After pronouncing this sentence on the rebellious Israelites, the Lord struck dead¹⁰ the ten spies who had excited them to sedition¹¹. But Josue and Caleb were spared and blessed¹². From God's dealings with the Israelites on this, as on many other occasions, we may learn that even after the guilt of sin has been remitted, there still remains a temporal punishment to be undergone in one way or another, unless God, by a new act of His mercy, takes it away.

⁷ Because they will not believe My promises, and will not trust My omnipotence. — ⁸ counting from the time they left Egypt. —

⁹ God said explicitly that all those over twenty years of age (with the exception of Josue and Caleb) should die in the wilderness, and that only those who at this time were under twenty, should enter the Promised Land. — ¹⁰ They died a sudden and unforeseen death.

— ¹¹ and said that the Land of Chanaan could not be conquered. —

¹² Then the Israelites, against the command of God, went into Chanaan

to attack its inhabitants. They had refused to put their trust in God, and now, they presumptuously trusted in their own strength and numbers, and acted as if they could very well dispense with the divine assistance. This was a formal defiance of God. The Chanaanites fell upon them and utterly defeated them.

II. Commentary.

The Justice, Mercy, and Wisdom of God. Almighty God had borne for a long time with the murmuring, refractory Israelites; but, at last, His divine patience was exhausted, and His justice demanded that they should be punished. The people of Israel were condemned to wander about in the desert for forty years, and of the 600 000 fighting men who left Egypt, only two entered the Promised Land. But even while He punished, God showed mercy, for at the request of Moses He so far forgave the people that He did not destroy them. He excluded all those who were grown up from the Promised Land, which, however, He explicitly promised anew to the younger generation. By the wisdom of divine Providence the forty years of wandering served this end, that the Israelites put aside all the heathen ideas and customs which they had imbibed in Egypt, and grew accustomed to the observance of the law of God and obedience to those whom He had placed over them, and were trained to be a valiant, warlike people.

The sins of the Israelites. In the story you have just heard the Israelites sinned against the First Commandment by their want of faith, hope, and charity. They sinned against the Second Commandment by cursing and blaspheming, and speaking and acting as if God were not the one, true, Almighty Lord. These sins were all the more grievous, because God was ever before their eyes, and was constantly working wonderful miracles for their benefit. They sinned against the Fourth Commandment, by rising against Moses, the servant of God; and also against the Fifth Commandment, by trying to kill the true and faithful spies, Josue and Caleb.

> *Cursing.* The people called a curse on themselves: "Would to God that we may die in the wilderness!" Their sinful wish was granted for their punishment: they were condemned

to die in the wilderness, and never entered the Land of Chanaan. This should be a warning to us to avoid all kind of imprecations. The cry of the unbelieving Jews in the time of our Lord: "His Blood be upon us and upon our children" (New Test. LXXII), is another terrible instance of an imprecation being fulfilled.

The power of intercession. Because Moses, the just servant of God, prayed earnestly for his people, God forgave them their many and grievous sins.

Temporal punishment. God told Moses explicitly that He forgave the people their sin on account of his intercession. Nevertheless, He visited them with a temporal punishment.

Lies and scandal. By a lying exaggeration of the strength of the Chanaanites, the spies (with the exception of Josue and Caleb) induced the Israelites to murmur against God. "Thou wilt destroy all that speak a lie" (Ps. 5, 7).

Sudden death is the worst punishment that can befall a sinner, because he has no time given him to do penance. Therefore, in the Litany of the Saints, the Church prays thus: "From sudden and unlooked for death, O Lord, deliver us!"

Moses's disinterested love of his neighbour. God would have made Moses a prince of some other great nation; but his love of self was well ordered, and stood in its proper connexion with his love of his neighbour, so that he would not seek his own advantage at the expense of that of his fellow men.

God's blessing is everything. The Israelites were completely routed by the Chanaanites and Amalekites, over whom they had previously obtained a victory (Chapt. XXXV). This was because God neither blessed nor helped them. Our help comes from the Lord: without Him we can do nothing.

The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence. The grown up Israelites did not enter the Promised Land, because they shrank from the burden of fighting. For the same reason many Christians do not reach heaven, because they do not correspond with God's grace, and will not fight against the enemies of their souls. "The kingdom of heaven suffereth violence, and the violent bear it away" (Mat. 11, 12).

III. Application.

Are you inclined to tell lies and to exaggerate? It was on account of a lie that God punished the ten spies with sudden death. Learn from this how much God, Who is truth itself, abhors lies. "Putting away lying, speak ye the truth every man with his neighbour" (Eph. 4, 25).

Have you got the evil habit of uttering curses or imprecations?

CHAPTER XLI.

THE REVOLT OF CORE AND HIS ADHERENTS.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

ONE day, whilst the children of Israel were in the wilderness, they found a man, gathering wood on the Sabbath-day, and they brought him to Moses and Aaron, who put him in prison, to see how he should be punished. But the Lord said to Moses: "Let that man die; let all the multitude stone him without the camp." So it was done.

Some time after, two hundred and fifty men, belonging partly to the tribe of Reuben, and partly to the tribe of Levi, and having for leaders Core¹, a Levite, and Dathan and Abiron², both of the tribe of Reuben—all these rose up against Moses and Aaron. They were envious of the high position of Moses and Aaron, and accused them of tyranny and ambition. They said: "All the people are holy³; why do ye raise yourselves above the people of God?" Moses, hearing this, and knowing that it was a revolt against God Himself, was much afflicted, and fell flat on his face.

He afterwards spoke to the rebellious Levites and told them: "Is it because God has chosen you to serve near the Tabernacle, that you wish to usurp the dignity of the priesthood also? To-morrow the Lord will make known⁴, who they are that belong to Him. Prepare, then, and stand each with his censer on one side, and Aaron will stand on the other."

On the following day, when the two hundred and fifty men were to appear before the Lord with their censers,

Moses ordered the leaders of the revolt to come forth from their tents. But they impudently replied: "We will not come." Then Moses went himself to their tents, accompanied by Aaron, and told the people to separate themselves from those wicked men, lest they should perish with them. Moses said: "If these men die the common death of men, the Lord did not send me⁵; but if the earth, opening her mouth, swallow them down, and they go down alive into hell, you shall know that they have blasphemed the Lord."⁶

Hardly had Moses ended these words, when lo! the earth opened under the feet of these hardened sinners, and swallowed them up, with their tents, and all that belonged to them, and they went down alive into hell. At the same time fire came down from heaven⁷ and destroyed the two hundred and fifty men who had taken sides with Core, Dathan and Abiron.

¹ Core's father was brother to Moses's mother. Core, Moses and Aaron were, therefore, first cousins. — ² As Reuben was Jacob's eldest son, these men felt themselves aggrieved that the descendants of Levi should have privileges, which they themselves had not got. — ³ They meant to say: "All men are called to the service of the Lord. We want no peculiar priesthood; and you (Moses and Aaron) are no better than we are. It was, in their opinion, presumption on Moses's part to assume the leadership, and on Aaron's part to set himself up as High Priest of the people. — ⁴ will decide if you are in the right or not. — ⁵ in that case I am not chosen by God to be His ambassador to you. — ⁶ and not me only. — ⁷ The fire proceeded from the pillar of cloud and killed the 250 men who, with Core, had assumed the priestly office of offering incense in the Tabernacle.

After this, the Lord spoke to Moses, saying: "Speak to the children of Israel, and take of every one of them a rod, by their kindreds, of all the princes of the tribes, twelve rods⁸, and write the name of every man upon his rod; and lay them up in the Tabernacle of the Covenant. Whomsoever of these I shall choose, his rod shall blossom." Moses did as the Lord had commanded.

Next day, when Moses entered into the Tabernacle, he found that the rod of Aaron had budded and blossomed. He then brought out all the rods of the children of Israel, and each one received back his own rod.

After all the people had seen that Aaron was chosen by the Lord, Moses was ordered to take Aaron's rod and place it in the Tabernacle⁹, that it might serve as a memorial and token of the rebellion of the children of Israel. The awful punishment of Core, Dathan and Abiron ought to show us the folly and wickedness of murmuring against the priests whom God has placed over us.

⁸ They were sticks cut from almond-trees. — ⁹ in the Ark of the Covenant, to be a lasting witness to the divine vocation of Aaron and his sons.

II. Commentary.

The Justice of God was shown by the punishment of the Sabbath-breaker, as well as by that of Core and his adherents.

God's Omnipotence worked a great miracle in connexion with Aaron's rod which, in one night, brought forth not only leaves, buds and flowers, but also ripe almonds.

Sabbath-breaking. The severe punishment of the Sabbath-breaker teaches us that the profanation of the Sabbath is a great sin. This sin often calls down temporal punishment, and it will certainly bring eternal punishment. "Remember", i. e. do not forget "to keep the Sabbath-day holy."

The divine institution of the Priesthood. By the terrible punishment of the rebels, and the blossoming of Aaron's rod, God again declared that the priesthood of the Old Testament was instituted by Him.

Rebellion against authority. The rising of Core and his adherents was a rebellion against both spiritual and temporal authority, for they refused to acknowledge that God had ordained Moses to be their leader, and Aaron to be their High Priest. The rebellion was, therefore, really against God, Who had called Moses and Aaron, and Who had attested their divine vocation by so many miracles. Hence Moses was right in saying: "Why do you stand against the Lord?" The terrible punishment of Core and those with him shows us how great a sin it is to rebel against those whom God has put in authority over us. "He that resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God. And they that resist, purchase to themselves damnation" (Rom. 13, 2).

Pride is a capital sin. Core, being proud, was offended at the idea that he was only a Levite, while Aaron and his sons were priests; and the family pride and ambition of Dathan and Abiron were injured by the fact that men of the small tribe of Levi were the representatives before God of the whole people. Their pride developed into envy, and this again developed into rebellion against the authorities, ordained by God.

Aaron's rod, a type of the Cross. Aaron's rod, which blossomed and bore fruit, is a type of the holy Cross, which by the Blood of Christ has brought forth such wonderful fruits of grace and virtue.

The Priesthood of the New Testament. We Christians are all called to be holy, and were all sanctified in baptism; but all Christians are not priests, for Jesus Christ has instituted a special priesthood in His Church, for the sanctification of all the faithful. If, even in the Old Testament, a special priesthood was necessary for the care of the things of God, how much more necessary is it that there should be a priesthood to look after the sacred mysteries of the Church! "Honour God with all thy soul, and give honour to the priests" (Ecclus. 7, 33).

Union of temporal and spiritual authority. God, by entrusting the highest spiritual and the highest temporal authority to the two brothers, Aaron and Moses, gave it to be understood that in all ages spiritual and temporal authority, Church and State, ought to work together for the good of mankind.

III. Application.

Do you show reverence for your spiritual and temporal superiors, your priests and teachers? Are you unruly or obstinate towards them? Do you ever pray for them?

CHAPTER XLII.

THE DOUBT OF MOSES.—THE BRAZEN SERPENT.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

IN the beginning of the fortieth year of their wanderings, the Israelites—the children of those that had died in the desert—suffered from the want of water¹, and began to murmur against the Lord. Then the Lord appeared in glory, and said to Moses: "Speak to the rock², and it shall yield

waters." Then Moses, taking the rod³ from the Tabernacle, assembled the people before the rock, which he was about to strike. Then he raised the rod and struck; but doubting⁴ a little he struck a second time.

That momentary diffidence, which was only a venial sin, and which made Moses strike the rock a second time, was displeasing to the Lord, and He told Moses and Aaron: "Because you have not believed me⁵, you shall not bring these people into the land which I will give them."

¹ The Israelites were now back again at Cades on the borders of Chanaan. — ² "Command it to bring forth water." — ³ the miraculous rod, kept in the Tabernacle. — ⁴ He doubted, whether God would work another great miracle for this refractory people. — ⁵ not believed quite firmly enough. If Moses had not believed at all, he would not have assembled the people before the rock.

Thence the Israelites removed their camp and came to Mount Hor⁶, where Aaron died⁷, and Eleazar, his son, became High Priest. Some time later, the Israelites, tired of their incessant wanderings in the desert⁸, began to murmur against the Lord and Moses. Wherefore fiery serpents⁹ were sent amongst them, by whose deadly bite a great number were killed¹⁰.

Then the people, knowing that the serpents had been sent in punishment of their sins, came to Moses and said: "We have sinned, because we have spoken against the Lord and thee: pray that He may take away these serpents from us." And Moses prayed for the people. Whereupon the Lord said to him: "Make a brazen serpent, and set it up¹¹ for a sign: whosoever, being struck, shall look on it, shall live." Moses, therefore, made a brazen serpent, and set it up for a sign¹², which healed all those that looked upon it.

The brazen serpent was a figure of the Redeemer, raised on the Cross. He it is who heals the wounds of all who, having been bitten by the infernal serpent, turn to Him with true compunction for sin, and hope in His divine mercy. The waters, which flowed from the rock in the wilderness to refresh the Israelites and slake their thirst, were emblematic of the divine graces, which flow to mankind through the Sacraments of the Church.



⁶ As it was not easy to enter Chanaan on the south side, Moses wished to enter it from the east. He went round to the south-east and came to Mount Hor (see map). — ⁷ On Mount Hor God called Aaron to Himself at the age of a hundred and twenty-three years; for he, equally with Moses, was not allowed to enter the Promised Land. — ⁸ To avoid the territory of the Edomites, the children of Israel had to turn towards the south, and then again return northwards along the eastern side of Edom (see map). All this time they had nothing to eat except manna, and they craved for other food. — ⁹ These snakes were poisonous. They were covered with fiery red spots and stripes, and the wound of their bite burnt like fire, and caused a deadly inflammation. — ¹⁰ The poisonous reptiles lurked round the camp, crept into the tents, bit those who were awake on their bare feet, and attacked the sleepers. The whole camp resounded with the cries of the sick, and the moans of the dying. The people now saw how much they had sinned. — ¹¹ on a pole. — ¹² of salvation.

II. Commentary.

The Justice, Mercy and Omnipotence of God are all shown in this story.—God punished both the doubt of Moses and the murmuring of the people: but He gave the ungrateful Israelites water, listened to Moses's prayer for them, and healed them from the bites of the snakes. By His almighty

power He called forth the water from the rock; and, through one glance cast at the brazen serpent by the dying, He restored them to life and health.

Murmuring against God is a great sin, as we can learn by the severe punishment which it brought on the murmuring Israelites. We must submit humbly to the will of our God and Creator, and never resist or murmur against Him and His divine decrees.

The use of sufferings. Whenever God visited the Israelites with sufferings, they repented of, and acknowledged their grievous sins.

Temperance. The sensuality of the Israelites was the cause of all their grumbling. They craved for other food than that which God fed them on, and refused to put up with any hardships. Instead of subduing their appetites and submitting themselves to God's will, they were discontented, and were always complaining and murmuring. They did not possess the virtue of temperance.

Doubts about faith. Moses and Aaron did not doubt Almighty God's power, but, for one moment, they doubted His mercy. They were righteously angry when they perceived that the new generation of Israelites, who from their youth up had witnessed the miracles of God, and who had been daily fed with manna, should be as wavering and refractory as their fathers had been before them. They felt that these thankless people were not worthy that God should again perform a miracle for their benefit. But God's thoughts are not our thoughts, and His mercy is infinitely great. God, Who is the very truth, had said: "Speak to the rock and it shall yield waters"; so they ought to have believed unconditionally and not doubted for a single moment. Anyhow, their doubt was a sin.

Venial sins. Wilful unbelief is a grievous sin. But as the doubt of Moses and Aaron was only a passing one, and as they did not give their full consent to it, but, in spite of it, obeyed God's command by going to the rock &c., their sin was not mortal, but only venial: nevertheless they were severely punished for it. If a person has laboured for a long

time to attain a certain object and has nearly reached it, it would be a very severe trial to him to be told that he must renounce it. Moses and Aaron had during forty years trained the Israelites and prepared them for their entrance into the Promised Land; they longed to complete their work, and, themselves, return to the land of their forefathers. But now, at the end of their labour, care and toil, they were told that they must die without setting foot in the long wished for country! It was indeed a severe punishment! But they humbly submitted to God's will, and preferred to expiate their sin in this world rather than in the next. This severe punishment of one venial sin teaches us to know and fear God's justice, and shows us that even venial sin is a great evil and must be expiated either here or in the world to come.

The intercession of the saints. The sinful people knew well that they did not deserve that their petition should be heard by God; therefore, they begged His faithful servant, Moses, to intercede for them; and to him God hearkened. For this same reason we call on the saints in heaven, the friends of God, to intercede for us.

The brazen serpent, a type of our crucified Lord. The brazen serpent set up on a pole is a type of our Divine Saviour. He Himself, in His discourse with Nicodemus told him that it was so (New Test. XV): "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whosoever believeth in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting." As the brazen serpent was raised up on high, so Jesus Christ (Who, by the mouth of David, said of Himself: "I am a worm and no man"; Ps. 21, 6) was raised up on the Cross. Whoever was bitten by a poisonous snake, and, being full of faith, turned his eyes to the brazen serpent, was cured. So we, when our souls are wounded by the infernal serpent, shall be healed of our sins, if we, being full of faith, turn our eyes to our crucified Saviour.

The Israelites bitten by the fiery snakes represent the whole of mankind. The infernal serpent has wounded all men, and has kindled in them the flame of sinful passions, and caused them to be subject

to everlasting death. It is of great significance that He Who redeemed us from sin and death should be typified by a (brazen) serpent. How is it that the serpent, the very type of sin, should also be a type of the Redeemer, and a means of salvation? Because the brazen serpent, hanging on the tree, was not poisonous, even though it had the form of a poisonous snake. Thus Jesus Christ, though free from the poison of sin, being "holy, innocent, undefiled" (Hebr. 7, 26), took the form of sinful man, laded Himself with the sins of the world, and suffered Himself to be raised on and nailed to the Cross in order to save all men from sin and eternal death. The brazen serpent, therefore, foreshadowed this, that the Redeemer would appear in the form of sinful man, would be raised on and nailed to a Cross, and that by this very means He would redeem man from the death of sin, and from eternal loss.

Jesus Christ, the source of salvation. The brazen serpent being a type of the Saviour of the world, God promised that "whosoever should look on it should be saved". The wonderful healing power of the lifeless serpent did not lie in itself, but in the crucified Saviour, of Whom it was a type.

The necessity of faith. Even as none of the mortally stricken Israelites could be cured unless, full of faith, they looked at the brazen serpent, which was set up as a sign of salvation, so no man can be saved unless, full of faith, he turns to the crucified God made Man. Only they who believe in Him will have life everlasting.

III. Application.

You have often done wrong, and said to yourself: "O, it is only a venial sin!" But think, even a venial sin is an offence against God, and is deserving of punishment. Ask yourself to which venial sin you are most prone, whether anger, lying, greediness, or so forth, and firmly resolve to overcome it.

CHAPTER XLIII.

THE PROPHECY OF BALAAM.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

AS the Israelites were nearing the Promised Land, they came to the confines of Moab¹. Balak, the king of that country, being in very great fear², sent the elders and the nobles of his kingdom, with rich presents to Balaam³, that he might come and curse his enemies. This Balaam believed in the true God; but, at the same time, he practised sooth-saying and divination.

When the messengers had arrived with their presents, Balaam said: "Tarry here this night, and I will answer whatsoever the Lord shall say to me." And God told him: "Thou shalt not go, neither shalt thou curse the people." So the princes returned to the king. But Balak sent a greater number of nobles, and richer presents, than the first time. Balaam told the messengers again to stay for one night. In that night God came to Balaam and said: "Arise and go; yet so, that thou do what I shall command thee."

Then Balaam arose and went to the land of Moab. The king took him to three different mountains, whence he could behold the Israelites in the valley, and ordered him to curse them. But Balaam, being each time prevented by God from cursing, blessed⁴ them, saying: "How beautiful are thy tabernacles, O Jacob, and thy tents, O Israel! He that blesseth thee shall also himself be blessed, and he that curseth thee shall be reckoned accursed."

¹ This country lay to the east of the Dead Sea (see map). — ² that Israel would conquer his country; for the chosen people had already overcome several neighbouring kings at the point of the sword. —

³ He was a heathen soothsayer of Mesopotamia, the country which lay between the Euphrates and Tigris, but he had heard of the wonderful things which God had done for the Israelites, and had learnt thereby to know the true God. The Lord revealed future things to him, in order that through him the heathen nations also might learn to look for the Redeemer. The superstitious king of Moab, Balak, wanted Balaam to curse God's people, hoping, if this were done, to be able to overcome them. — ⁴ By this God revealed His omnipotence to the heathen.

Then Balak grew angry, and exclaimed: "I had intended to honour thee, but the Lord hath deprived thee of the honour; for I called thee to curse my enemies, and thou, on the contrary, hast blessed them three times." So he ordered him to return to his country. Thereupon the eyes of Balaam were opened and he saw a vision⁵, and his lips were opened, and he prophesied: "I shall see him, but not now⁶; I shall behold him, but not near⁷. A star shall rise out of Jacob, and a sceptre⁸ shall spring up from Israel⁹, and shall strike the chiefs of Moab¹⁰ and shall smite the

children of Seth." The prophecy of Balaam refers to the Saviour, and the star mentioned is the star which appeared to the three wise men at the birth of Christ.

⁵ In which God revealed the future to him. — ⁶ i. e. not now, but later. — ⁷ i. e. but in the far future. — ⁸ a ruler. — ⁹ one who should belong to the chosen people and be descended from Jacob, or Israel. — ¹⁰ the heathen powers.

II. Commentary.

God's Omnipotence is shown by His forcing Balaam to bless the Israelites against his will.

God's Omniscience is shown by His revealing to Balaam, what would happen in the far future.

The sixth promise of the Messias. The prophecy of Balaam points to the Divine Redeemer, and reveals, firstly, that He would not come for a long time; secondly, that He would be one of the children of Israel; thirdly, that He would come, like a star, from above, shedding light around Him; fourthly, that He would be a king; and fifthly, that He would overcome the enemies of His kingdom. Let us see how this prophecy has been fulfilled. Firstly, the Redeemer did not come till 1450 years after Balaam spoke; secondly, He was, as Man, descended from Jacob, and was born in Judea; thirdly, He came down from Heaven to be the Light of the world; fourthly, He has founded the Church, the kingdom of God, which, fifthly, overcomes all His enemies, and will last till the end of time. The brazen serpent foreshadowed our Lord's humiliation; the prophecy of Balaam foreshadowed His majesty.

Faith in God's word. Balaam said to Balak that he could not alter the word of the Lord; and this rule applies to every word of God revealed to us. Nobody can or dare alter God's word, either by adding to it or by taking away from it. We must believe and accept revelation just as it is.

Superstition. Balak did not believe in the true God, but he cherished the foolish, superstitious idea that Balaam's curse could injure the people of God.

The star out of Jacob and the three kings from the East. Balaam's home was in the east, that is, east of the Promised Land. There,

the prophecy of Balaam was well known, and during the hundreds of years which elapsed before our Lord's Incarnation, the tradition of this prophecy was preserved, and there existed a living expectation of the rising of a wonderful star, and at the same time of a sceptre, i. e. a king who should spring up out of Israel. Therefore, the three kings from the east, as soon as they had seen the wonderful star, went straight to Judea, to look for Him, the new born king, Whose birth was heralded by the star.

III. Application.

Do not curse! Say to yourselves: "There is a God, Who cannot be mocked."

CHAPTER XLIV.

PARTING ADVICE OF MOSES.—HIS DEATH.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

THE hour had come at last when Moses was to be taken away from his people¹. Before he died, God commanded him to lay his hands upon Josue, in the presence of all the people, so that they might obey him as their ruler². For God had said to Moses: "Thou shalt not pass over this Jordan; but Josue shall bring the people into the land which I swore I would give to their fathers."

Then Moses made his farewell discourse to the people in the most touching manner³: "Hear, O ye heavens, the things I speak; let the earth give ear to the words of my mouth. Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God⁴ with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength. Let none be found among you that consult soothsayers, or observe dreams and omens. These things the Gentiles do; but thou art otherwise instructed. The Lord thy God will raise up to thee a prophet of thy nation, and of thy brethren, *like unto me*. Him thou shalt hear."

He reminded them of all the wonders which God had wrought in their behalf. He promised them that, if they were faithful in observing the commandments of God, they should be blessed in their houses, blessed in their fields, blessed in the fruits of the land, blessed in their cattle,

blessed when they came in and when they went out. Then he warned them that, if they did not hear the voice of the Lord and keep His commandments, a curse should come upon them and all they possessed ⁵.

¹ The forty years of wandering were drawing to a close, and the time had come for the Israelites to enter the Promised Land. Moses, however, was not to lead them in (Chapt. XLII). — ² From henceforward Josue was to be God's chosen leader of His people, instead of Moses. Therefore, Moses had to lay his hand upon him in the presence of all the Israelites, that they might know that he was their appointed leader. You have already heard about Josue in Chapters XXXV and XL. — ³ Pay particular attention to these parting words of Moses. — ⁴ Who has done such great things for you, and has made you His chosen people. — ⁵ The choice of serving God or not was given to them. As a dying father exhorts his children, so did Moses, in the most moving way, exhort his beloved people to choose what was right.

Then, having blessed the people, he went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo ⁶. From that place the Lord showed him, from afar off, the Land of Chanaan, which He had promised to his fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

There Moses died, at the age of one hundred and twenty years ⁷; and all Israel mourned him for thirty days ⁸. Moses was a figure of Jesus Christ. Like Christ, he proclaimed the law of God, and confirmed his preaching by miracles, prophecies, and a holy life. The Prophet of whom Moses speaks is the Saviour, Who was to give a new law more perfect than that of Moses.

⁶ East of the Dead Sea (see map). — ⁷ Holy Scripture says that "his eye was not dim, neither were his teeth moved". This means that he was not feeble from old age, and might, humanly speaking, have lived some time longer, if God had not called him away. — ⁸ and quite rightly too, for, after God, he was the greatest benefactor of his people. Through him God had instituted the Covenant and worked great miracles, and had spoken face to face with him.

II. Commentary.

The Justice and Faithfulness of God are shown to us in a very awe-inspiring manner in this story. Moses was a very holy servant of God, distinguished for his virtues and services. But, in company with his brother Aaron, he, for one short

moment, doubted God's mercy, and for their sin God pronounced on both of them this sentence: "You shall not bring these people into the land which I will give them." Soon after this, Aaron died on Mount Hor. At last the Israelites arrived at the borders of Chanaan, and the time had come for them to cross the Jordan and take possession of the Promised Land; but Moses was not allowed to go further. From the top of Mount Nebo, Almighty God showed him the beautiful Land of Promise, and then he had to die; for God always does that which He says He will do. If the Lord God punished Moses so severely for one venial sin, how much ought we to fear His justice, and avoid everything that is wrong!

In Moses's parting discourse he exhorted the Israelites as follows:

1. *They were never to forget the Covenant* sealed with God, but were always to keep it faithfully. His exhortation applies to us also, who ought never to prove unfaithful to our baptismal vows.

2. *They were to worship God only*, and love Him with their whole hearts. Our Lord tells us that this commandment is the first and greatest commandment, for it contains all the others.

3. *They were to bring up their children in the fear and love of God*, and relate to them all God's wonderful works and the benefits which He had showered on them, so that they might be moved to have a thankful love for Him. It is a sacred duty of parents to bring up their children in the fear of God, for He has done far more for us Christians than He ever did for the Israelites.

4. If the Israelites kept the Commandments, *God promised them rich earthly blessings*; for, as the people were sensual and earthly, sensible and earthly rewards were held out to them. It is true in all times that only he who fears God can have any true happiness on earth, and for this reason St. Paul says: "Glory and honour and peace to every one that worketh good" (Rom. 2, 10); but all the same we Christians ought not to serve God for earthly rewards, but

for those which are imperishable and eternal. We ought to love God for His own sake (independently of all rewards and punishments), because He is infinitely worthy of love. The law of the New Testament is more perfect than the law of the Old Testament. Moses pointed to the New Covenant, for, in his parting discourse, he gave utterance to

5. *The seventh promise of the Messias.* He foretold to his people that one day another prophet should rise in their midst, who, also, would institute a Covenant: "The Lord will raise up to thee a prophet of thy nation, and of thy brethren, like unto me. Him thou shalt hear." Who is this Prophet? Jesus Christ, Who was a prophet like to Moses, for, firstly, He instituted the New Covenant as Moses had instituted the Old; and secondly, He foretold the future as Moses did, proclaiming the divine law. (See Commentary, Chapt. XXXVII, in what way Moses was a type of our Lord.)

The threefold office of Christ. Moses's prophecy about the Redeemer points to the prophetic office of our Lord. Balaam's prophecy points to His kingly office; and the typical brazen serpent pointed to His priestly office, by foreshowing that the Divine Saviour would be sacrificed on the Cross, and would heal our sins.

Look back at Moses's great virtues, his living faith, his firm confidence in God, his burning zeal for God's honour, his patience, humility, piety, gentleness, fortitude, and love of his people. Think of his blessed death, at the end of his laborious life spent in the service of God. He is now great in heaven, and we on earth venerate him as one of the best and noblest of men.

Our pilgrimage to heaven. The forty years' wandering of the Israelites in the desert is a sensible type of our pilgrimage to the promised land of heaven. The passage of the Red Sea delivered the Israelites from the bondage of Egypt: we must pass through the waters of Baptism to be freed from the bondage of sin. The Israelites wended their weary and perilous way through the desert to the Promised Land: our road to heaven is also wearisome, and many are the enemies that we meet on the way ("Narrow is the gate, and strait is the way which leadeth to life." New Test. XXI). The Lord God Himself, going before them showed the Israelites the way: Jesus has gone

before us and has, by word and example, shown us the way to heaven. God fed them with manna: Jesus feeds and strengthens our souls with the true Bread from heaven, His Sacred Body and Blood. The Israelites strove and fought and conquered only by the help and protection of God: we too, in our fight against the enemies of our salvation, must seek God's grace, without the help of which we can do nothing. The children of Israel received, as the reward of their labours, the safe possession of the land of Chanaan: we shall receive, as our reward, the eternal possession of the kingdom of heaven.

III. Application.

You should seek to know what God has done, and is still doing for you, and what He requires of you. You can learn this by your instructions on the Catechism and Bible History. But are you not lazy and negligent about such instruction? Do you always learn the lesson set you? Do you always pay great attention to what you are taught?

JOSUE AND THE JUDGES.

(About 1450—1095 B. C.)

CHAPTER XLV.

ENTRANCE OF THE ISRAELITES INTO THE PROMISED LAND.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

AFTER the death of Moses, the Lord spoke to Josue: "My servant Moses is dead; arise and pass over this Jordan¹, thou and the people with thee. I will deliver to thee every place which the sole of your foot shall tread upon. No man shall be able to resist thee all the days of thy life." Encouraged by these promises the people advanced towards the Jordan. When they reached its banks², Josue ordered the priests to take the Ark of the Lord, and go before the people. As soon as the priests, carrying the Ark, stepped into the Jordan³, and their feet touched the water at the bank, the waves that came from above stood heaped together, and swelling up like a mountain, were seen afar off; but the floods, which were beneath, ran down into the

sea, until they wholly failed. Then all the people passed over through the channel that was dried up. They pitched their tents before Jericho. On the following day they celebrated the Pasch, and having eaten of the fruits of the earth, the manna ceased to fall⁴.

Jericho was a strongly fortified city, capable of offering a long resistance⁵. The children of Israel wished to take it, but they lost courage when they saw the height and strength of the ramparts. But the Lord, seeing their want of confidence, ordered Josue to bring together all the fighting men of Israel, and to march in deep silence, around the city once a day for six days.

But on the seventh day they should go around the city seven times; and at the last time, all the people, on hearing the priests that were before the Ark, sounding the trumpets, should shout together with a great shout. So it was done⁶. When the seventh day came, they marched silently six times around the city; but at the seventh turn, when the priests sounded the trumpets, all the people shouted, and instantly the walls fell down⁷. Every man went up by the place that was against him; and they took the city.

¹ This river is very rapid, because between the Sea of Galilee and the Dead Sea it has a fall of nearly 666 feet: its breadth is from 66 to 100 feet, and its mean depth 10 feet. — ² The Jordan was swollen. It was a short time before the Pasch, and the snow on the mountains was melting. — ³ full of confidence in God, Who had promised miraculous help to Josue. — ⁴ because the Israelites had reached the end of their wanderings in the desert, and would be able from henceforth to find sufficient food in the fruitful land of Chanaan. — ⁵ Jericho (see map) was a strongly fortified town, and there were many fighting men inside to defend it. The Israelites were not provided with battering-rams, or any other implements for breaking down the walls, and were not accustomed to that kind of warfare. They did not, therefore, think it possible that they would be able to take a fortified city. — ⁶ The repeated marching round Jericho convinced the Israelites both of the strength of the city and of the necessity of divine assistance. — ⁷ Of course this was not the effect of the noise of the trumpets and shouting, but of the divine omnipotence.

After many hard-fought battles, Josue at length made himself master of all the land of Chanaan. During this



period he several times experienced the especial assistance of God. On one occasion he waged war against the five kings of the Amorrites. The Israelites conquered and pursued their enemies. But night coming on would soon have put an end to the victory. Then Josue spoke to the Lord, in the sight of all the people: "Move not, O sun, toward Gabaon; nor thou, O moon, toward the valley of Ajalon."⁸ So the sun stood still in the midst of heaven⁹. There was not, before nor after, so long a day.

133 Chanaan was divided among the twelve tribes of Israel¹⁰. The tribe of Levi alone received no portion, as they lived on the tithes and sacrifices¹¹; but they received forty-eight cities in different parts of the country. The descendants of the two sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasses, received each a portion of the land. Thus the country was divided among the twelve tribes: Reuben, Simeon, Juda, Zabulon, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Aser, Nephtali, Benjamin, Ephraim and Manasses. Thus were the promises fulfilled which God had made to the patriarchs. When Josue was old, he assembled

the people and admonished them to observe the law¹², and to avoid intercourse and marriage with the heathens. Josue died at the age of one hundred and ten years.

The Promised Land was a figure of heaven. As the Israelites did not obtain possession of Chanaan till they had toiled, fought, and suffered much, so Christians cannot enter heaven, the true land of promise, unless they contend bravely against the enemies of their salvation.

⁸ Josue (and the Book of Scripture written by him) speaks here, as we do still, according to appearances; for, judging by what we see, it seems as if the sun moved round the earth. — ⁹ God, in a wonderful way, prolonged the day-light, so that the Israelites were able to profit by their victory, and follow it up. The opposite miracle to this took place at our Lord's crucifixion, when the sun was darkened for three hours. — ¹⁰ both east and west of the Jordan. Two tribes and a half, those of Reuben, Gad and half Manasses, lived to the east of the Jordan, the other nine tribes and a half to the west. The Tabernacle was set up at Silo, between Jerusalem and Sichem, and remained there for 300 years. — ¹¹ The priests and Levites received no land, for they were entirely devoted to God's service, and were not to trouble themselves about agriculture &c. They received the tenth part of all wheat, fruits and clean beasts, and a certain portion of the sacrifices. — ¹² Moses had written down the revelation of God from the beginning, and had, in five books, recorded all the laws of God.

II. Commentary.

✠ *The Omnipotence of God.* By God's will the running waters of the Jordan rose up like rocks; at His bidding the strong walls of Jericho fell down; and by His command the light of day was prolonged. Nothing can resist God's omnipotence, nothing can hinder the workings of divine Providence!

The Faithfulness of God. The promise which God had made to Abraham six hundred and fifty years before was now fulfilled, and by His wonderful guidance, Abraham's descendants were now given possession of the Promised Land. God also fulfils what He threatens. Not one of those men who departed from Egypt, except Josue and Caleb, entered the Promised Land. They all died in the desert, as God said they should die. God has promised us everlasting happiness if we keep our baptismal vows, that is, if we stand

fast in faith, keep the commandments, and use the means of grace given to us: if we neglect to do this, we shall not go to heaven, but to hell.

The object of miracles. During the journey of the Israelites to the Promised Land God worked great miracles for His people. Now that it was a case of completing the great work, and putting His people in possession of the Promised Land, He worked still greater miracles. By doing this the Lord wished to confirm His people's faith in His omnipotence, and their confidence in His loving care. He wished them also to learn that they could do nothing by their own strength and numbers, and that it was only by His help they could attain to the Promised Land, and that they, therefore, owed Him an everlasting debt of gratitude. Neither can we reach the promised land of heaven by our own strength, but only by the help of God's grace.

The folly of idolatry was proved to the Chanaanites by the miracle which made the sun to shine on the earth for a longer time than was its wont, and this for the purpose of bringing injury on them. The Chanaanites worshipped the sun and moon as gods, and the fact that these heavenly bodies obeyed the command of Josue, the servant of God, ought to have proved to them that the God of Israel was infinitely more powerful than their self-made deities which, far from being able to help them, were compelled to help their enemies.

The power of prayer. Full of faith, Josue prayed, and at his prayer the day was prolonged.

133 *The power of faith.* "By faith the walls of Jericho fell down" (Hebr. 11, 30). The Israelites knew very well that their marching round the town, the blowing of the trumpets and the shouting of the multitude could not, of themselves, overthrow the walls; but full of faithful confidence in God, they punctually did everything that He commanded, and through their faithful obedience, God worked the miracle.

Josue, the ninth type of Jesus Christ. He was this, in so far that he led the Israelites into the Land of Promise, and triumphantly conquered it. Jesus Christ, by His Death and

Resurrection, has overcome sin, Satan and death, and has opened to us the kingdom of heaven. He leads us there by His doctrine, His example and His grace, and especially by holy Baptism.

The passage of the Jordan (as well as that of the Red Sea) is a type of Baptism, by which we enter the kingdom of God upon earth, i. e. the holy Church, and acquire a claim to those priceless means of grace which Jesus Christ bequeathed to His Church.

Processions. By God's command the Israelites went in procession round Jericho thirteen times. These were religious processions, in which the Ark of the Covenant was carried.

III. Application.

After crossing the Jordan the Israelites had to fight for a long time before they acquired the Promised Land. Thus we, after our holy Baptism, must fight against the enemies of our souls, especially against evil inclinations and passions. "Labour as a good soldier of Christ Jesus . . . He also that striveth for the mastery is not crowned except he strive lawfully" (2 Tim. 2, 3. 5). As a reward, we shall receive the everlasting possession of heaven. Fight especially against your besetting sin. Make a good resolution to overcome it every day, and let it be the object of your particular examination of conscience.

CHAPTER XLVI.

THE JUDGES.—GEDEON.—SAMSON.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

SO long as that generation of the Israelites lived who had eaten of the manna in the desert, and who had seen the wonders of the Lord wrought for them, both in the wilderness and in the taking of Chanaan, they did not depart from the way of the Lord; but their children, having intermarried with the pagan nations round them¹, contrary to the express command of God, began to adore the idols which their wives worshipped. Then the Lord delivered them into the hands of their enemies².

They afterwards repented and turned again to the Lord their God³. In this manner, falling into idolatry and returning again to the worship of the true God they went on for several generations. Whenever they humbled themselves before God, and showed signs of true repentance, the Lord hastened to their relief. From time to time He raised up among them brave and pious men⁴, who smote the enemy with a strong hand. These men were called Judges⁵. Amongst them were Barac, Jephthe, Samson, who was famous for his great strength—and the pious Samuel.

¹ The heathen nations were not rooted out; for God suffered them to exist in order to prove whether His people were steadfast in faith, and would resist the allurements of the heathen. — ² God's will was that the idolaters should be exterminated, that they might be punished for the enormities (such as human sacrifices) of their idolatry. In spite of all the wonderful things which God had done for the Israelites and which they had witnessed, the Chanaanites were not converted; therefore the day of grace was past for them, and judgment now overtook them. This judgment ought to have been executed by the Israelites, but they proved slothful, and even formed friendships with the heathen, though Josue had expressly warned them not to do so. Then God was angry with His people, and allowed the heathen nations to have dominion over them. They fell in turn, under the power of the Moabites, who lived to the east of the Dead Sea; of the Madianites, who lived in Arabia near the Moabites; and of the Philistines, who lived on the coast of the Mediterranean (see map). — ³ whom they had so lightly forgotten. — ⁴ full of the Spirit of God and strong in faith. — ⁵ They were so called because, firstly, they executed God's judgments on the heathen, and, secondly, because they governed and judged the Israelites according to the law of God. Fifteen Judges, in all, were raised up during the space of three hundred years.

But the most renowned of all the Judges was Gedeon, the son of a common Israelite, who lived at the time when God had delivered the children of Israel into the hands of the Madianites⁶ on account of their sins⁷.

The Lord sent an angel to Gedeon, as he was threshing and winnowing wheat at his father's house⁸. The angel said to him: "The Lord is with thee, O most valiant of men. Go in this thy strength, and thou shalt deliver Israel out of the hands of the Madianites." Gedeon asked how he could deliver Israel, seeing that his family was the lowest in

the tribe of Manasses, and that he himself was the least in his father's house. The angel assured him that God would be with him, and that the Madianites should be cut off to a man.

Soon after this the Madianites crossed the Jordan with a large army, and encamped in the valley of Jezrael. But the Spirit of the Lord came upon Gedeon⁹, and he sounded the trumpet, and calling together the Israelites, formed an army of thirty-two thousand men, and drew them up in battle-array. Before commencing the attack Gedeon said to God: "If Thou wilt save Israel by my hand, I will put this fleece of wool¹⁰ on the floor¹¹; if there be dew on the fleece only, and it be dry on all the ground beside, I shall know that by my hand, as Thou hast said, Thou wilt deliver Israel."¹² And it was so. The next day he asked God that the fleece might be dry and the ground wet with dew. And God did as Gedeon requested.

⁶ Who, with the Amalekites, and other people, lived east of the Jordan and "like locusts filled all places" (Jud. 6, 5). — ⁷ and especially for having adopted the worship of the false god, Baal, and built altars to him, though they worshipped the true God as well. — ⁸ in order to conceal it from the enemy. He did not dare do it on a threshing floor in the open field, for fear of being seen. — ⁹ and filled him with a great courage and confidence, and a burning zeal for God's honour. — ¹⁰ the skin of a lamb. — ¹¹ The Israelites, like all Eastern people, had their threshing floors in the open field, and without a roof. — ¹² Gedeon asked for a sign from God not only for his own sake, but in order to give courage to the thirty-two thousand Israelites with him.

But the Lord spoke to Gedeon and told him that his army was too great, and that the Madianites should not thus be delivered into his hands, lest the children of Israel should glory, and say that they conquered by their own strength.

And the Lord commanded Gedeon to speak to the people and proclaim in the hearing of all that whosoever was fearsome or timorous should return home. And the army, hearing this, twenty-two thousand men retired from the field, leaving only ten thousand to meet the enemy. The Lord spoke again to Gedeon, telling him that there were



still too many soldiers. "Bring them to the waters", He said, "and there I will try them".

He then told Gedeon to observe how the men would drink when they came to the water. "They that shall lap the water with their tongues, as dogs are wont to lap, thou shalt set apart by themselves; but they that shall drink, bowing down their knees, shall be on the other side." The number of those who had lapped the water from the hollow of their hand, in order to save time, was three hundred men¹³; all the rest of the multitude had knelt down to drink at their ease.

Gedeon kept with him only the three hundred who drank the water from the hollow of their hand; the rest he sent to their homes. He then divided the three hundred men into three companies, and gave them trumpets in their hands, and empty pitchers, and lamps within the pitchers. And he said to them: "What you shall see me do, do you the same; I will go into one part of the camp, and do you as I shall do."

Gedeon and the three hundred men who were with him approached the enemy's camp at the midnight-watch, and entering in, began to sound their trumpets and to strike the pitchers one against the other, dazzling the bewildered enemy with the sudden light of the concealed lamps. At

the same time the Israelites cried out with a loud voice: "The sword of the Lord and of Gedeon."¹⁴

The sudden alarm and the fierce attack of Gedeon's men, threw the Madianites into such confusion that they turned their swords against each other, and fled in all directions. Then all the tribes of Israel, seeing that victory was on their side, rose up and pursued the Madianites, cutting off their retreat on every side, so that of the whole army of one hundred and thirty-five thousand men, only fifteen thousand returned alive to their own country. Israel had peace for forty years.

¹³ These three hundred were temperate men, who had their desire to quench their thirst under control, whereas the remainder threw themselves on the ground so as to drink as speedily and copiously as possible. — ¹⁴ has come upon you and will overcome you. The sword of Gedeon was at the same time the sword of the Lord, because God was with Gedeon and would through him overcome the enemy. The night-attack caused such confusion among the Madianites that in the dark they turned one against the other. In their flight they were cut down by the Israelites, who, by Gedeon's orders, had taken possession of the banks of the river.

The Israelites fell again into idolatry, and were persecuted by the Philistines¹⁵. But an angel appeared to the wife of Manue¹⁶, of the tribe of Dan, and said: "Thou shalt bear a son; no razor shall touch his head, for he shall be a Nazarite of God from his infancy, and he shall begin to deliver Israel from the hands of the Philistines." When the child was born, he was called Samson¹⁷.

Going to the city of the Philistines, he met a young lion; but the Spirit of the Lord came upon Samson¹⁸, and he tore the lion to pieces. Being delivered into the hands of the Philistines¹⁹, he tore the cords with which he was bound, and finding the jaw-bone of an ass, he slew with it a thousand men. Remaining over night in Gaza²⁰, the Philistines bolted the gates of the city to prevent his escape. But Samson arose at midnight, took the gates with their posts and bolts, and carried them to the top of a hill²¹.

¹⁵ The Israelites were oppressed by the Philistines for forty years on account of their idolatry. — ¹⁶ Manue and his wife, being well

advanced in years, had given up all hope of having children. — ¹⁷ Samson was given miraculously to his parents, and was consecrated to God, first by their vow, and later by his own. God blessed him, because from his youth up he remained faithful to his vow, refraining from intoxicating drinks, and never cutting his hair. — ¹⁸ and gave him a superhuman strength. — ¹⁹ So low had the Israelites sunk that they delivered over to the enemy him whom God favoured, instead of joining him, and, under his leadership, casting off the yoke of the Philistines. — ²⁰ one of the chief towns of the Philistines (see map). — ²¹ so that in the morning the Philistines could, as a humiliation and warning, espy their city gates set up on the top of the hill.

Dalila, a Philistine woman, after many pleadings ²², extracted from him the secret of his strength. "The razor hath never come upon my head, for I am a Nazarite: that is to say, consecrated to God. If my head be shaven my strength will depart, and I shall be like other men." ²³ During his sleep Dalila cut off his hair, called the Philistines, who captured him, put out his eyes, and cast him into prison ²⁴. Some time after, a great feast was celebrated in honour of the idol Dagon ²⁵, when more than three thousand Philistines were assembled in the house. Blind Samson, whose hair had grown again, was brought out that he might amuse them by feats of his strength ²⁶. He told the boy who led him to bring him to the pillars upon which the whole house rested. Then he prayed: "O Lord God, remember me and restore to me my former strength." Then grasping the pillars, he shook them so strongly that the whole house rocked and fell ²⁷ upon himself and all the people. In this manner he killed many more enemies of God at his death than he had killed during life ²⁸.

²² Because the princes of the Philistines had promised her much money if she would extract Samson's secret from him. — ²³ By shaving his head Samson would break his vow and would no longer be consecrated to God. — ²⁴ They treated him as a slave and set him to the most servile works. How, in his misery, Samson must have repented of his folly, and prayed to God for pardon! — ²⁵ a fish-god. They said: "Our god (Dagon) hath delivered our enemy Samson into our hands" (Jud. 16, 23). The feast was, therefore, held to celebrate the triumph of the idol Dagon over the God of Samson. — ²⁶ and sing and dance. They wished to make sport of him whom God had chosen to be judge over His people! What a humiliation for

Samson! — ²⁷ On the occasion of the feast a wooden stage, resting on pillars, was erected, on and under which the spectators sat. When, therefore, Samson, with superhuman strength, overthrew the pillars, the whole edifice fell down. — ²⁸ He sacrificed his own life, so as to destroy the despisers of God and the oppressors of his people.

II. Commentary.

Justice, Patience, and Mercy of God. The Chanaanites, if they had had a right will, could have learnt to know the true God by means of the wonders which He wrought before their very eyes. As, however, in spite of this, they persevered in impiety and immorality, the judgments of God overtook them, and they were rooted out by the Israelites. God's justice was also manifested to the Israelites on account of their faithlessness, when He allowed them to be overcome and oppressed by the pagans. But He also showed mercy to them, for as often as they acknowledged their sin and turned to Him, He forgave them and delivered them from their oppressors. Even when they again forsook Him, He did not give them up, but bore patiently with them, and visited them with tribulations, whereby they might be once more converted to Him. Indeed, "O Lord, Thou art a God of compassion and merciful, patient and of much mercy" (Ps. 85, 15).

Why God permits evil. God permitted some of the heathen nations to remain in Chanaan, so that His chosen people might be proved. Thus it is that God still suffers faithless and bad people to exist, both in order to give them time for repentance, and to prove the virtuous and faithful, so that their virtue and fidelity may be more meritorious.

Bad company. Man, being inclined to evil, ought, as far as is possible, to avoid associating with bad people. Evil communications corrupt good manners.

The misery of sin. He who forsakes God will be forsaken by God. "Sin maketh nations miserable" (Prov. 14, 34), and not only nations, but individuals also. "Many are the scourges of the sinner" (Ps. 31, 10). Just think what a scourge a bad conscience is! "There is no peace to the wicked" (Is. 48, 32).

The use of trials. In their misery the Israelites turned to God. God sends trials to sinners in order to convert them.

Original sin. By these repeated falls of the Israelites we can see how corrupt and prone to evil the human heart is. This natural inclination to evil is an effect of original sin, and can only be overcome by the grace which Jesus Christ has obtained for us.

The necessity of self-denial. Even after we have been cleansed from original sin and made children of God by holy Baptism, there remain many enemies in our hearts, namely sinful inclinations and passions. We must unceasingly fight against these by steadily denying ourselves, or else we shall be overcome by them and be made the slaves of sin. The grace necessary for this holy warfare is given to us in the Sacrament of Confirmation.

Mixed Marriages. Holy Scripture especially reproaches the Israelites for contracting marriages with unbelievers, and for becoming, thereby, indifferent about their faith, and even being led into apostasy. Mixed marriages are always dangerous to faith, and they easily lead to spiritual indifference and even to apostasy. For this reason marriages between Catholics and those who are not Christians are absolutely forbidden, and are null. Even marriages between Catholics and non-Catholic Christians are dangerous, and are therefore forbidden, being only allowed by dispensation when security is given against the danger of apostasy, and for the Catholic education of the children of the marriage. A mixed marriage, it has been most truly said, begins by a spiritual divorce, for, from the beginning, those who are married are separated on the most important point, namely religion.

God governs the world. God gave the Israelites into the hands of the Midianites, for these could never have overcome them except by His permission; and, when in their misery they turned to Him, He delivered them through Gedeon and gave them peace for many years. But that Israel might know that it was to God it owed the victory, He told them that if 32 000 men went out to fight, they would not conquer the enemy, but that if only three hundred fought, then the victory would be theirs. God directs the lives of nations, as of individuals, with power, wisdom and mercy. He is Lord also over nature, and turns its powers which way soever He will, as He showed by the twofold miracle of the fleece.

Prayer obtains help in time of need. When neither life nor property was safe, and the Israelites were hunted from

their homes, they turned to God and cried for help. And God heard their prayer and raised up Gedeon to be the saviour of his people.

Humility. Gedeon was humble of heart. He considered himself to be the lowest of the low, and did not trust to his own skill or strength, but only in God's help. As soon as the twofold miracle of the fleece had convinced him that God was favourable to the Israelites, and had chosen him to save them, he confidently attacked the overwhelming host of the enemy with a mere handful of fighting men, and put it to flight. God exalteth the humble. "He that exalteth himself shall be humbled, and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted," said our Lord. Gedeon considered himself to be small and weak, but he did great things by the help of God. "The weak things of the world hath God chosen that He may confound the strong, that no flesh should glory in His sight" (1 Cor. 1, 27).

The confidence in God shown by the three hundred. They might easily have felt disheartened, and might have said: "How can we conquer an enemy who outnumber us by four hundred and fifty to one!" But they trusted in God's help, followed the example of their valiant leader, and thus gained a glorious victory, in spite of overwhelming odds against them. We too, in our fight against the enemies of our salvation, ought not to lose courage, but should trust in God and say with the holy apostle: "I can do all things in Him, who strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4, 13).

Temperance. Gedeon was to know those whom God had chosen for the battle by their self-control and temperance. For the service of God temperance and self-denial are absolutely necessary, since without these there can be no true virtue. He who does not govern himself is a slave to his evil inclinations and passions: "Better is he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh cities."

Gedeon, the tenth type of Jesus Christ. Gedeon, as saviour of his people, is a type of Jesus Christ, the Saviour of the whole world. Like Gedeon, our Lord during His early years led a humble, hidden life. As Gedeon overcame his numerous

enemies with a few soldiers, so did our Lord overcome the pagan world by His few apostles and disciples, whose only weapons were the trumpet (preaching) of the Gospel, and the torches (the light) of good works.

The fleece wet with dew is, according to the holy fathers of the Church, a type of the Incarnation of the Son of God. As the dew fell on this white fleece, severed from the flesh, so did the Son of God take our human nature by the operation of the Holy Ghost in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Thus it is said (Ps. 71, 6): "He (God) shall come down like rain upon the fleece."

The fleece left dry is a type of the Immaculate Conception of our Lady. Even as this fleece remained dry when all the ground around was wet, so was Mary alone preserved from the stain of original sin, which adheres to every one else.

The Goodness of God. God chose Samson before his birth, and therefore without any merit on his part, and gifted him with many graces, especially that of superhuman strength, in order that by him the enemies of Israel might be punished and humbled. This God did when Israel had not repented and was still persisting in idolatry. With preventing care He showed the Israelites by the call of Samson, that though they were unfaithful to Him, He had not forsaken them, but could and would free them from their degradation if only they would turn to Him.

The Mercy of God is shown by this, that God forgave Samson his sin when he repented of it in captivity and misery, and restored to him the gift of supernatural strength, which he had lost by his own fault. God not only forgives the repentant sinner his sin, but restores to him the lost grace of justification, and revives all his merits.

Self-denial. During all his life Samson practised self-denial, for he abstained from wine and all intoxicating drinks. But one irregular desire brought the hero Samson to his fall. This should warn us to suppress promptly every sinful movement. St. Ambrose says: "The strong and powerful Samson strangled a lion, but he could not strangle his own passions. He broke the bonds of his captors, but he could not break the bonds of his own lusts." If such a strong hero could be so weak, how great care ought we to take

not to allow our passions to obtain a mastery over us. Our Lord Himself warns us: "Watch ye and pray, that ye enter not into temptation. The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak" (New Test. LXVII).

Samson, the eleventh type of Jesus Christ. The rough, warlike period of the Judges possessed its types by which the future Saviour of Israel and the whole world was foreshadowed. Samson and Gedeon were both types of our Lord. St. Augustine says of Samson: "He acted like a strong man, and suffered like a weak man. I see in him both the strength of the Son of God and the weakness of man. In those great and wonderful things which he did he was a type of Christ." His birth was announced by an angel: so also was the Birth of Jesus Christ. He overcame a lion: Jesus Christ has overcome the infernal lion. He fought and conquered, all alone, and with an ignoble weapon: Jesus Christ fought and conquered, all alone, by the despised Cross. He was betrayed for money, was given up to the enemy by the men of his own tribe, and was bound and mocked: thus was it with Jesus. Samson gave his life for his people, doing his enemy much injury by his death: Jesus offered Himself up of His own will, and by His death overcame sin and Satan. Samson lifted up and carried away the gates and bolts of Gaza: Jesus Christ, by His resurrection, threw open the gates and burst asunder the bolts of the grave.

Consequences of mortal sin. Samson, from his youth up, led a severe life, consecrated to God. He was a soldier of God, a hero of the faith, and a saviour of his people, as long as he remained true to his holy state and corresponded with grace; but when he formed a friendship with a heathen woman, and by so doing forsook God, he in his turn was forsaken by God, and fell into the hands of his enemies who oppressed and degraded him, and made him a slave. Thus it is with those Christians, consecrated to God by Baptism, who yet obey their sinful passions and separate themselves from God by mortal sin. There falls on them the sleep of spiritual sloth, they are bound with the bonds of sin, they lose all their strength, i. e. the grace of God, they become spiritually blind, and fall into the slavery of sin and bad habits.

III. Application.

I dare say you think it horrible and inconceivable that the Israelites, in spite of all God's benefits, visitations and

warnings, should have proved faithless to Him and have broken the covenant sealed with Him! But give a glance at your own life. Have you never been faithless to God? Have you never fallen back into your former sins? Have you always kept the promises you made to God, and acted up to your resolutions? You will often fall from weakness, but, oh, try not to offend God wilfully and intentionally.

In your Confirmation you were consecrated and fortified to be a soldier of Christ. You must, therefore, fight courageously and steadfastly against the enemies of your salvation. Practise self-control, and pray humbly for God's help, and you will conquer them.

Let Samson's story teach you this: "He that thinketh himself to stand, let him take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10, 12).

CHAPTER XLVII.

RUTH'S AFFECTION FOR HER MOTHER-IN-LAW.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

IN the days when the Judges ruled in Israel there was a famine in the land. And a certain man of Bethlehem¹ with his wife and two sons went to sojourn in the land of Moab². His name was Elimelech and his wife Noemi. After having lived many years in Moab Elimelech died, and his two sons, who had taken wives from amongst the daughters of Moab, also died ten years after their father's death.

Noemi being now left alone, and full of sorrow for the loss of her husband and two sons, arose to return to her own country³. Her two daughters-in-law⁴, Orpha and Ruth, went forth with her. As they journeyed on towards the land of Juda, Noemi spoke to Orpha and Ruth: "Go ye home to your mothers. The Lord deal mercifully with you as you have dealt with the dead and me."⁵ And she kissed them. But they lifted up their voice and wept, and said: "We will go on with thee to thy people."

Noemi answered: "Do not so, my daughters; for I am grieved the more for your distress; and the hand of the Lord is gone out against me." Then Orpha kissed her

mother-in-law and returned. Ruth, however, would not depart. Noemi spoke again: "Behold, thy kinswoman is returned to her people; go thou with her."

Thereupon Ruth replied: "Be not against me, for whithersoever thou shalt go, I will go, and where thou shalt dwell, I also will dwell. Thy people shall be my people and thy God my God⁶. The land that shall receive thee dying, in the same will I die, and there will I be buried." Then Noemi, seeing that Ruth was steadfast, would not urge her any more to return to her friends.

¹ Of the tribe of Juda. — ² east of the Dead Sea. There was no famine in that country. — ³ She had learnt that the famine had ceased in Chanaan, and she longed to be back in her own country. —

⁴ the two Moabite women, widows of her dead sons. — ⁵ May God be merciful to you and prosper you, because you were merciful to my sons, nursing them in their sickness &c., and have been full of love for me, a poor forsaken widow. — ⁶ We can see by this that Ruth had renounced idolatry, and had received the true faith.

So they journeyed on together, and came to Bethlehem, where the report was quickly spread, and the women said: "This is that Noemi."

It was the beginning of the barley-harvest, and Ruth asked Noemi: "If thou wilt, I will go into the fields and glean the ears of corn that escape the hands of the reapers."⁷ And Noemi said: "Go, my daughter." Now it so happened that the field in which Ruth went to glean belonged to a kinsman of Elimelech, named Booz who was very rich. And behold Booz came out to see the reapers, and said: "The Lord be with you." They answered: "The Lord bless thee."

And having observed Ruth gleaning in the barley-field, he asked the overseer: "Whose maid is this?" The overseer replied: "This is Ruth who came with Noemi from the land of Moab; and she desires leave to glean the ears of corn that remain, following the steps of the reapers. She hath been in the field from morning till now, and hath not gone home for a moment."⁸

Then Booz addressed Ruth very kindly, and said: "Hear me, daughter: Keep with my maids and follow where they reap. I have charged my young men not to molest thee,

and if thou art thirsty, go to the vessels and drink of the waters whereof the servants drink, and dip thy morsel in the vinegar." Full of gratitude for these kind words, Ruth bent down before Booz, and asked how it came that she, a woman of another country, should find favour in his sight.

Booz told her that all she had done for her mother-in-law since the death of her husband, had been related to him. He prayed: "Mayest thou receive a full reward of the Lord, under whose wings thou art fled." He then privately told the reapers: "Let fall some of your handfuls of purpose, that she may gather them without shame." She gleaned therefore in the field till evening, and then beat out with a

rod what she had gleaned, which was an ephi: that is three bushels. Grateful for the kindness shown her, she returned to her mother-in-law, carrying with her the barley she had threshed, and the leavings of the meal that had been given her. Noemi was astonished and asked: "Where hast thou gleaned to-day, and what hast thou wrought? Blessed



be he that hath had pity on thee." Ruth told the man's name, that he was called Booz.

Next day she returned to the field of Booz and continued to glean after the reapers, till all the barley was laid up in the barns. Some time after Booz said to Ruth: "My daughter, all the people that dwell within the gates of my city know that thou art a virtuous woman." So he married her. Then the ancients came and said to Booz: "May this woman be an example of virtue in Ephrata, and may she have a famous name in Bethlehem." The Lord blessed their union and gave them a son whom they called Obed. Then Noemi, full of joy, taking the child, laid it in her bosom and she

carried it and was a nurse to it. Now Obed was the father of Isai, whose son was David, of whose race Christ was born ⁹.

⁷ It was her own impulse to go and glean ears of corn for her mother-in-law, as was the custom among the poor; but she first modestly asked Noemi's consent. — ⁸ She was, therefore, very industrious. This pleased Booz, and made him speak to her as he did. — ⁹ David, therefore, was grandson to Obed, and great-grandson to Booz and Ruth.

II. Commentary.

Divine Providence. Was it by chance that Ruth went to the field of Booz? No, she went there by the guidance of a good and wise Providence. God ordained that Booz should get to know the virtuous Ruth, and should, though she was poor, take her as his wife. This was so ordained in order that Ruth and Noemi should be rewarded for their virtues. Noemi was now above want, and could serve God without anxiety about her maintenance. Nothing happens by chance.

Several beautiful examples of virtue are put before us in this story.

Noemi left her home only from necessity, and kept her faith untarnished in the midst of a heathen society; and as soon as the famine was over, returned to her own country and fellow-believers. She unselfishly allowed her daughters-in-law to remain in Moab, and asked God to bless them: she did not wish them to share her poverty or help to support her. There is one point to which I wish to draw your attention, as it might not strike you of yourselves. By her living faith, her real piety and sincere love, in a word, by her good example, Noemi converted her daughter-in-law Ruth to the true faith, so that the latter was able to say: "Thy God is my God." Oh, if only all Catholics would act as she did; if they would only act up to their holy faith and practise the virtues which it teaches, then the whole world would be convinced of the truth and excellence of the Catholic faith! Our Divine Lord said: "Let your light shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father Who is in heaven."

Ruth left her home and friends both out of attachment to her mother-in-law and fidelity to her faith. Once she had

got to know the true God, she wished to dwell with the people of God; and so firm was she in her resolution that neither the persuasions of Noemi nor the example of Orpha could move her from it. She was, therefore, steadfast in faith, and gave up everything rather than live with unbelievers, and place her soul in danger. She was, furthermore, distinguished for her humility, obedience, and diligence. She asked Noemi's permission to glean; she was not ashamed of her poverty; she was indefatigable in her labour of gleaning, and saved some of her dinner for Noemi: thus she perfectly fulfilled the Fourth Commandment. Would that all children had as great a love for their own parents as Ruth had for her mother-in-law! You see how Holy Scripture praises Ruth's diligence. Diligence is a virtue and does honour to those who practise it. Sloth is a vice and a capital sin, and brings shame and disgrace in its train. Ruth was also retiring, modest and pure: the whole town testified to her being a virtuous woman. God rewarded her virtue by giving her a good and wealthy husband, and by making her the great-grandmother of king David and (because Christ was of the family of David) one of the ancestors of the Divine Redeemer.

Booz loved his neighbour, and had compassion on the poor and, to him, unknown Ruth. He behaved very nobly in taking Ruth as his wife in spite of her poverty: he very rightly valued Ruth's virtues more highly than gold and riches. God rewarded him, for He gave him a most virtuous wife, and blessed his marriage, so that he became one of the forefathers of the Messias.

Ruth is a type of the Church of the Gentiles. Though born a heathen, she obtained, by her conversion, a share in the blessings of Israel, and was even chosen to be an ancestress of the Redeemer. By this God signified that the heathen, if they would believe and be converted, should have a share in the salvation which was to spring from Israel.

III. Application.

Ruth brought joy and honour to her mother-in-law. Do you cause joy to your parents? Have you never brought shame over them or caused them grief?

Be kind and generous to the poor. Do not look down on poor children. Do you not give preference among your friends to the children of rich parents? A man's worth does not consist in what he has, but in what he is. Virtues such as faith, love, diligence, modesty, truth and humility are the greatest of riches: everything perishes except virtue. God looks to the heart, not to the outward appearance or wealth. He who is without faith is the poorest of men, never mind how much money he may possess. Are these your sentiments? Do you like associating with good children?

Are you diligent from morning till night, as Ruth was?

CHAPTER XLVIII.

SAMUEL.—IMPIETY OF THE SONS OF HELI.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

IN the days when Heli, the High Priest, was Judge¹ in Israel, there lived at Mount Ephraim a virtuous man, called Elcāña, and the name of his wife was Anna. Now Anna had no children. She, therefore, multiplied her prayers before the Lord that He would deign to give her children. So one day she went to Silo to pray in the Tabernacle of the Lord. There, before the door of the Tabernacle, she shed many tears and prayed, and made a vow saying: "O Lord of Hosts², if Thou wilt be mindful of me and give me a man-child, I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life."

The Lord heard her prayer, and gave her a son, whom she called Samuel, which means, God-given. Now, when three years were passed, and the child was yet very young, Anna took three calves, three bushels of flower, and a bottle of wine, and carrying the boy with her she went to the House of the Lord. There she offered her son to Heli the High Priest, saying: "The Lord has granted my petition, therefore I also have lent my child to the Lord all the days of his life." And the child ministered in the sight of the Lord before the face of Heli. Now, the two sons of Heli, Ophni and Phinees, were wicked and had no fear of



God³, for when the people came to offer sacrifices, Ophni and Phinees carried the flesh of the victims away by force. So their sin was very great, because they withdrew men from the sacrifice of the Lord.

Heli knew all this; he knew what wicked things his sons did in the Sanctuary, and he mildly rebuked them, saying: "It is no good report that I hear, that you make the people of the Lord to transgress." But, being very old, he took no severe measures to punish them, or prevent their evil deeds.

¹ Heli, being successor to Aaron, was High Priest; as well as Judge. He, therefore, combined in his person the highest spiritual and the highest temporal authority. — ² Ruler over all the hosts of men upon earth and of angels in heaven. — ³ Heli's sons are called in Holy Scripture children of Belial, or of the devil, because of their wickedness. Whilst the sacrifice (sin- or peace-offering) was seething in the caldron, they used to thrust in a flesh-hook and take the best of the flesh for themselves. They also took for themselves of the flesh of the whole-burnt offerings, in which the victims ought to have been entirely consumed by fire. This made the people very angry, and they were unwilling to offer sacrifices.

If the sons of the High Priest violated the sacrificial laws so grossly, it was but to be expected that the people should lose their respect for the sacrifices.

It came to pass that one night, before the lamp of the Lord had gone out, Heli slept on a couch near the Tabernacle, and Samuel hard by⁴. The Lord called Samuel. He answered: "Here am I," and went to Heli and asked: "Why hast thou called me?" But Heli replied: "I did not call thee, my son; return and sleep."

So he returned and slept again. But the Lord called him a second time, and Samuel acted as before. Heli said: "I did not call thee, my son; return and sleep." Then the Lord called Samuel a third time. And Samuel, rising up, went again to Heli, saying: "Here am I, for thou didst call me." Heli now understood that the Lord had called the boy.

And he said to Samuel: "Go and sleep, and if He shall call thee any more, thou shalt say: "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth!" So Samuel went and slept in his place. Then the Lord came and stood, and called: "Samuel, Samuel." He answered: "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." The Lord spoke: "Behold, I will do a thing in Israel, and whosoever shall hear it, both his ears shall tingle. In that day I will raise up against Heli all the things that I have spoken. I will begin and I will make an end, because he knew that his sons did wickedly, and he would not chastise them."

Next morning, Heli asked the boy to tell him what the Lord had said⁵. But Samuel was afraid. Heli, however, insisted, and Samuel at length told the vision. Thereupon Heli humbly⁶ replied: "It is the Lord; let Him do what is good in His sight."

⁴ Where cells, or little rooms, were built for those priests who had to attend to the service of the Tabernacle. — ⁵ He suspected that the revelation contained nothing that portended good to himself. — ⁶ and full of resignation.

Now in those days it came to pass that the Philistines waged war against Israel, and when they joined battle, the Israelites were defeated, and lost about four thousand men.

After the people had returned to the camp, the ancients of Israel said: "Let us fetch the Ark of the Covenant from Silo, that it may save us from the hands of our enemies."⁷ They sent therefore to Silo, and the two sons of Heli⁸, Ophni and Phinees, accompanied the Ark to the camp. The people, on beholding the Ark in their midst, set up a great shout, and the earth rang with their shouting.

The Philistines, however, made a new attack, and the Israelites were again defeated, with great slaughter; thirty thousand were slain, and the rest put to flight. And a messenger came to Heli, saying: "Thy two sons, Ophni and Phinees, are dead, and the Ark of the Lord is taken." Now, Heli, who was far advanced in years, on hearing that the Ark was taken, fell from his chair backwards by the door, and broke his neck and died⁹. The Philistines took the Ark of the Lord, and placed it in the temple of Dagon, their false god!¹⁰

Next morning when they went into the temple, they found the idol lying prostrate on the ground before the Ark. Besides, the Lord afflicted them with many evils on account of the Ark. Many persons died, and from the fields there came forth a multitude of mice, and there was great confusion in the country.

Perceiving this the Philistines resolved that the Ark of God should no longer remain amongst them. Then they took the Ark and laid it upon a cart, and taking two kine, or young cows, they yoked them to the cart. The cows took the way that led to Bethsames, and thus the Ark was brought again into the country of the Israelites.

Meanwhile, after the death of Heli, Samuel had become Judge in Israel. He assembled the people, reproached them for their evil doings, and then said: "If you turn to the Lord with all your heart, and put away the strange gods from among you, and prepare your hearts unto the Lord, and serve Him only¹¹, He will deliver you out of the hands of the Philistines."

So they humbled themselves before God in prayer and fasting. And the Lord took pity upon them, and gave them

such a victory over the Philistines¹², that for many years after they did not dare to approach the frontiers of Israel.

⁷ They wished to have the Ark of the Covenant with them because they remembered the miracles which God had worked by means of it, both at the passage of the Jordan, and at the siege of Jericho, and they hoped that its sacred presence would now procure a victory for them. — ⁸ who were with the Ark. — ⁹ The good old High Priest did not fall backward when he heard that his sons had perished, but only when the messenger told him that the Ark had been taken. This last news struck him with more horror than the first, for he believed that it meant that God's covenant with His people was now broken, and that Israel would be destroyed. — ¹⁰ This was not in order to pay honour to the Ark, but so as to make an offering of it to their god Dagon, to whom they believed they owed their victory. God, however, proved to them that their idol was worth nothing, and could do nothing. — ¹¹ for they worshipped idols at the same time that they were worshipping the Lord God. — ¹² God sent a terrible storm of thunder and lightning which threw the Philistine army into confusion, and made its defeat easy.

II. Commentary.

The Justice of God. This story teaches us above all things to know, fear and love God. He rewarded the virtuous Samuel by revealing Himself to him, by calling him to be Judge, and by freeing and converting His people through him. On the other hand God punished Heli, his sons, and the impenitent Israelites by their defeat, and the loss of the Ark. He also punished the idolatrous Philistines by means of various plagues, and finally by their complete overthrow.

The Goodness and Mercy of God. He graciously heard Anna's prayer, and sent her a son. He called Samuel from his earliest infancy to serve Him in the Tabernacle, loaded him with favours, preserved him from being contaminated by Heli's sons, and made him judge and saviour of his people. God forgave the repentant people their faithlessness, and gave them a great victory over those who had oppressed them.

The Faithfulness of God. Samuel, in God's name, said to the Israelites: "If you turn to the Lord with all your heart, He will deliver you." God kept this promise, as He also kept His threat against Heli and his sons.

God is Lord over nature. It was God Who overthrew the image of Dagon; it was He who sent the mice to devastate the land of the Philistines, the pestilence which swept away the idolaters, and the storm which threw their army into confusion.

Prayer in time of trouble. Anna's example teaches us that we ought to have recourse to fervent prayer when we are suffering, or in any sort of trouble; for God is the great Consoler and Helper, being holy and all powerful. "Is any of you sad, let him pray" (James 5, 13).

The power of prayer. By prayer Anna obtained a son; and by prayer Samuel obtained help for his people. "Samuel cried to the Lord for Israel, and the Lord heard him" (1 Kings 7, 9). Why, therefore, should not God hearken to the intercession of the saints in heaven?

Keeping vows (see Commentary, Chapt. XVI). Anna kept her vow faithfully. She most certainly wished to keep her beloved child with her, but, all the same, she "lent him to the Lord".

Fasting and confession of sins are penances well-pleasing to God, and obtain pardon from Him. The Israelites bewailed and confessed their sins, formed good resolutions, and made satisfaction by fasting.

Piety, obedience, and truthfulness. Young Samuel did not let himself be led away by the bad example of Heli's sons, but rather imitated the piety of the aged High Priest, and was zealous in the performance of the work given him to do for God. He was obedient to Heli, whose own sons had renounced the obedience due to him. Each time during the night that he heard his name called he sprang from his bed, and ran to Heli, saying: "Here am I!" Thus promptly and cheerfully should all children obey their parents and those set over them. Samuel showed his truthfulness when Heli asked him what the Lord had revealed to him. It pained him to say anything disagreeable to the kind old High Priest, but, being asked, he told him everything. Thus you, too, should always speak the truth when questioned by those set over you.

Sacrilege. Reverence in the House of God. Heli's sons were impious and dissolute. They dishonoured the Sanctuary, and brought sacrifices into disrepute. If the desecration of the Tabernacle of the Old Covenant was such a great sin, how much more ought we to guard against any desecration of our churches! If any wrong conduct, relating to the typical sacrifices of the Old Testament, was so severely punished, how sinful and criminal must it be for Christians to behave irreverently during the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and even whisper, laugh &c.!

Punishment of disobedient children. If the sons of Heli had hearkened to and obeyed the injunctions of their good father, they would not have been punished by God. But as they would not listen to his warnings, they died a violent death, and their names have ever since been associated with ignominy.

Sharing in the guilt of others. Heli was a virtuous, God-fearing man. He was so anxious about the Ark of the Covenant that the news of its capture affected him more than the news of the death of his sons. Moreover, he was entirely resigned to God's will, when Samuel announced to him his approaching punishment. ("It is the Lord; let Him do what is good in His sight!") Why then was this virtuous servant of God punished by sudden death? God Himself said that it was because he did not correct his sons. He was too good-natured and weak towards them. He ought to have been strict with them when they were young, and have punished them severely when they would not listen to his injunctions. "He who will not hear must feel." He was too indulgent, he said to himself that they would be more reasonable and would improve as they grew older. Instead of this they grew up quite beyond control, became accustomed to evil, and no more consulted their father about anything. Now, I ask you: Was it a happiness for these men that their father should be so indulgent towards them, and should never correct them? How much sorrow and suffering would Heli have spared himself, how much trouble would he have avoided, if he had corrected his sons betimes.

As he did not do so, he shared in their guilt, and was punished by God. Children, if they take advantage of their parents' kindness, bring unhappiness and even eternal ruin both on themselves and on their parents. It is a strict duty of parents to punish the wrong-doings of their children. It is a false love, and a great misfortune for children when parents are weak and over indulgent. Holy Scripture says: "He that spareth the rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him correcteth him betimes" (Prov. 13, 24).

Grace cannot be obtained without repentance. The Israelites thought that if they had the Ark with them, God would be sure to protect them and give them the victory. But how could the tables of the law inside the Ark avail them, if they no longer carried the law of God in their hearts? They ought first to have sincerely repented, and then, God would have been gracious to them. Nothing holy, not even the Sacraments, can help us, if we do not first turn to God and cast away strange gods (i. e. sinful habits and passions).

Resistance of God's grace. Samuel, the "asked of God", was, as his very name signifies, a child of grace. He did, in fact, receive many graces from God; but then, he faithfully co-operated with them, and thus became in time the converter and saviour of his people when they were in adversity. Heli's sons were also highly favoured by God. They were called to the priesthood by right of their birth; they grew up in the Tabernacle, and had the good example of their father before their eyes from their youth up; but they resisted God's grace, lightly rejected their father's warnings, and drew on themselves the displeasure of the best among the people. By their misuse of grace their hearts grew harder and harder. Once more God tried to move them, by letting them know through Samuel that the day was not far off when He would punish them and their father, but they would not profit by this grace. Still hardened in sin, they went out to fight, and died an impenitent death at the hands of the enemy.

Hearkening to the word of God. Whenever we hear the word of God (whether in sermons, or instructions &c.), we should say with Samuel: "Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth." We should listen eagerly to the word of God which He speaks to us through the mouths of His priests. "He that heareth you, heareth Me," said our Lord (Luke 10, 16).

Worthy and unworthy Communion. The Ark brought blessing and divine protection to the Israelites as long as they feared God, but when they forgot Him and would not repent, it brought them misfortune and defeat; and even brought plagues and pestilence on the Philistine

idolaters. Thus it is with the Most Holy of the New Covenant. Holy Communion brings priceless blessings to the penitent, but a curse and eternal damnation to the impenitent.

III. Application.

Do you promptly obey the commands of your parents and those who are set over you? Do you go to them as soon as you are called? Do you get up as soon as you are told? Do you take to heart their injunctions and exhortations? Are you most like Samuel, or the sons of Heli?

How do you behave during the services of the Church? Do you always speak the truth? Be truthful, even when it costs you a good deal to be so, and when you have to face reproof or punishment.

THE KINGS.

(1095—588 B. C.)

CHAPTER XLIX.

SAUL ELECTED KING (1095 B. C.).

I. Narrative and Explanation.

AFTER these days it came to pass that when Samuel was old, he appointed his two sons as Judges over Israel. They, however, were not like their father¹, but took bribes and perverted judgment. So the ancients came to Samuel and said: "Thy sons walk not in thy ways; therefore give us a king to judge us, as all nations have." This word was displeasing to Samuel, for he knew that the Lord was their king, and none other². Still the Lord told him to hearken to the voice of the people, and to give them a king for their punishment. Moreover, he added, the king would rule over them with a heavy hand³, and they would cry out and lament, but the Lord would not hear them, because they had desired for themselves a king.

Now, there was a man of the tribe of Benjamin who lost his asses, and he said to Saul, his son: "Take one of

the servants with thee, and arise, go and seek the asses." So they both started out and came to the land of Suph, and entered the city where Samuel dwelt. Now, the day before Saul's arrival, the Lord had spoken to Samuel: "To-morrow, about this same hour, I will send to thee a man, whom thou shalt anoint king over my people Israel." It so happened that Samuel met Saul in the midst of the city. And Samuel said: "Go up before me, that you may eat with me to-day, and that I may let you go in the morning⁴. As for the asses, be not solicitous, for they are found." Next morning, when the day began to dawn, Samuel took a little vial of oil⁵, and poured it on the head of Saul, and kissed him⁶, and said: "Behold, the Lord has anointed thee to be prince over His inheritance."

Thereupon Samuel assembled the people, and Saul stood in their midst; and he was a choice man, being taller than any one else from his shoulders and upwards. Then Samuel said: "Behold him whom the Lord has chosen." And the people cried out: "God save the king!"⁷

¹ They were not just and God-fearing like their father. — ² This desire to have an earthly king seemed to him to be, on the people's part, a renunciation of the divine government of God. — ³ and exercise great power over them, imposing burdens and taxes on them. He told them this so that later, when they felt the hand of the king to press heavily on them, they might not complain. — ⁴ Samuel knew this, because God had revealed it to him. — ⁵ for the typical signification of oil, see Chapt. XVI. The anointing of Saul was a sign that God had chosen him to be king; and at that moment the Lord gave to His anointed the gifts necessary for his high calling, i. e. wisdom, strength, justice. — ⁶ as a sign of homage. — ⁷ By these words they acknowledged him as their king, and paid him homage.

Now, the people of Amalec were very bad, and the measure of their iniquity was full. God, in His wrath, sent Samuel to Saul, saying: "Go and smite Amalec and all that he hath. Spare him not, nor covet anything that is his, but slay both man and woman and child, ox and sheep and camel."

Saul, therefore, waged war against Amalec, and defeated them along the line from Hevila till Sur. The common people

he slew with the edge of the sword; but, contrary to the command of God, he spared Agag the king. The flocks and herds of little value he also destroyed, but spared the best flocks and the best herds. Moreover, filled with pride, and forgetting that success comes from God, he erected an arch of triumph in memory of his victory⁸.

When Samuel had come to the camp of Israel, Saul said to him: "I have fulfilled the word of the Lord." Samuel answered: "What meaneth, then, the bleating of the flocks, and the lowing of the herds which I hear?" Saul tried to excuse himself, saying that the people had spared the best flocks and herds, to sacrifice them to the Lord⁹. Samuel, being angry, spoke to him in the name of the Lord: "Doth the Lord desire holocausts and victims, and not rather that the voice of the Lord should be obeyed? For obedience is better than sacrifices; and to hearken better than to offer the fat of rams.

"For as much, therefore, as thou hast rejected the word of the Lord¹⁰, the Lord hath also rejected thee from being king over Israel¹¹. The Lord hath rent the kingdom from thee this day, and has given it to one who is better." Then Samuel departed, and beheld Saul no more till the day of his death. The rejection of Saul teaches us that disobedience to the voice of God is visited with severe chastisements.

⁸ As if he owed the glory of his victory to himself and not to God. — ⁹ He tried to lay the blame on his people. — ¹⁰ because you have set aside the command of God, and not obeyed it. — Had Saul remained faithful to God, the royal dignity would have passed on to his son. God's rejection of Saul consisted in this: firstly, that the kingdom would not remain in Saul's family; and, secondly, that the crown was snatched from Saul himself by a premature death, and given to David, who, even in Saul's lifetime, was anointed to be his successor.

II. Commentary.

God's Providence directed that the asses should be lost and that Saul, while seeking them, should meet Samuel. By God's command Samuel anointed Saul king, and presented him as such to the people. God commands and directs everything as He desires.

+ *God's Goodness* to the Israelites is shown by His granting their request to have a king. It was Saul, however, whom he especially loaded with proofs of His love. Saul acknowledged his unworthiness in the words which he used to Samuel: "I am of the least tribe of Israel, and my kindred the least among all the families of the tribe of Benjamin!" And yet God chose him to be king over His people, turned the hearts of the Israelites towards him, and gave him the victory over all his enemies. — What more could God have done to ensure Saul's unbounded gratitude and willing obedience!

The Justice of God. Saul was ungrateful and disobedient to God, and, therefore, the punishment of divine justice fell on him. He was rejected by God; God's blessing left him; and his throne passed, not to his son, but to David.

Pride. Saul's misfortunes sprang from pride. He became proud on account of his high dignity, and on account of the victories which God gave him, so that he began to trust in himself and did not give glory to God. Being proud and arrogant, he no longer obeyed God's commands, but kept back the best of the flocks of the Amalekites. Pride leads to disobedience. When Saul, by his grievous sin, had forsaken God, then God forsook him. "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble" (James 4, 6).

Obedience to God. To Saul's excuse that the flocks and herds had been kept to offer as sacrifices, Samuel, filled with the Holy Ghost, replied: "Obedience is better than sacrifice", i. e. sacrifices of beasts are good and pleasing to God, if they are offered with a right intention; but still better and more pleasing to God is obedience, whereby a man offers to God the spiritual sacrifice of his own will, on the altar of his heart. By sacrifices man gives to God something which he possesses; by obedience he offers himself, and his free will, the noblest of all his possessions. He who loves God will love and do His holy will.

Jesus Christ, or the Anointed. In the Old Testament, kings, as well as High Priests, were the anointed of the Lord. Jesus, being High Priest and King, is indeed the Christ, i. e.

the Anointed. Jesus is king both because he is God, and because He reigns over His spiritual kingdom, the Church.

The kingdom of Israel belonged to God. Hitherto the Lord God had been the immediate King, Lawgiver and Leader of His people. Now it was His will to give them an earthly king to be His representative, and to govern them in His name, and according to His laws. He did not let them choose their own king, but set over them one whom He chose, in order to show the Israelites that He Himself still remained their supreme King and Lord. He established the kingdom of Israel in order, firstly, to bind the twelve tribes into a closer unity than had existed under the Judges; secondly, to show the people that even under kings they can prosper only when they observe the laws of God; and thirdly, to foreshadow the kingdom of the Messias. Kings and princes reign "by the grace of God": i. e. they are appointed by God, to govern in His name; therefore their subjects ought to honour, love and obey them, as the representatives of God. "Fear God; honour the king" (1 Petr. 2, 17).

III. Application.

Ask yourself whether you are proud or self-willed? Do you give glory to God when you succeed in anything? Do you boast? Are you fond of talking about yourself? Do you take pleasure in praising others, or is it more pleasing to you to find fault with them? No other virtue is of any value in God's sight, without humility. You owe to God everything that you are, or have, or can do; therefore, thank God and do not offend Him by pride. Be very careful to-day to utter no word in self-praise.

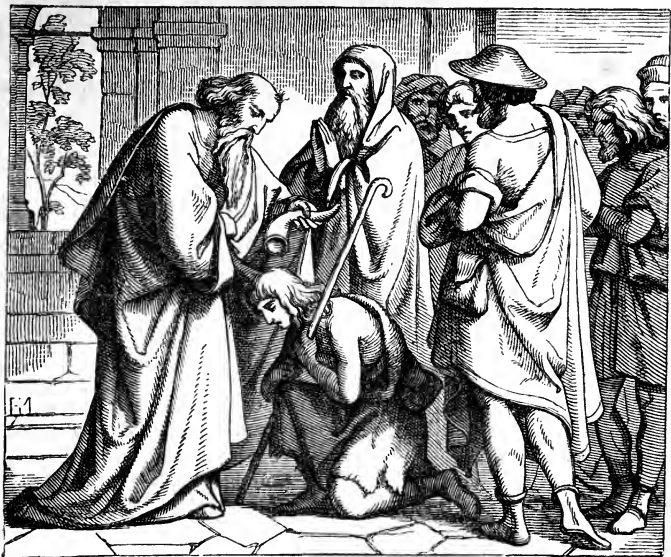
CHAPTER L.

DAVID, THE YOUNG SHEPHERD.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

SAMUEL loved Saul, and mourned for him because the Lord had rejected him. One day the Lord said to Samuel: "How long wilt thou mourn for Saul whom I have rejected? Fill thy horn with oil, and come, that I may send thee to Isai, the Bethlehemite; for I have provided me a king among his sons."

So Samuel went to Bethlehem¹, and took with him a victim, and called Isai and his sons to partake of the sacrifice².



Now when Eliab, the eldest son, had come forward, who was of a high stature, the Lord said to Samuel: "Look not on his countenance; for man seeth those things that appear, but the Lord seeth the heart."³

Isai then called in his other sons, one by one, six in number. When Samuel had seen them all, he said: "The Lord has not chosen any of these. Are here all thy sons?" Isai replied: "There remaineth yet a young one, who keepeth the sheep." Samuel hastened to answer: "Send and fetch him, for we will not sit down till he come hither."

Now, when David came in, he was beautiful to behold, and of a comely face; and the Lord said: "Arise, and anoint him, for this is he." Then Samuel, taking the horn of oil, anointed him in the midst of his brethren. Immediately the Spirit of the Lord came upon David, and remained with him.

¹ This little town lay in the territory of the tribe of Juda. —

² to assist at the sacrifice and also partake of it. — ³ i. e. the qualities of the heart, whether a man be God-fearing, humble &c.

But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and an evil spirit troubled him⁴. Wherefore the servants of Saul

said to him: "Let our lord give orders, and we will seek out a man, skilful in playing on the harp, that when the evil spirit is upon thee, he may play with his hand, and thou mayest bear it more easily."

When the servants saw that this counsel was pleasing in the eyes of Saul, one of them added: "Behold, I have seen the son of Isai, a skilful player, and a man fit for war, and prudent in his words, and a comely person." Thereupon David was sent for⁵. And whenever the evil spirit was upon Saul, David took his harp and played with his hand⁶, and Saul was refreshed and better, for the evil spirit departed from him⁷.

⁴ The consciousness that, through his own fault, he was forsaken by God, oppressed him. As he did not turn to God by prayer and penance, an infernal spirit gained influence over him, and kindled in him an unnatural melancholy, so that his soul became a prey to the evil passions of envy, hatred and blood-thirstiness, till at last he was driven to despair and suicide. — ⁵ Saul made him his armour-bearer. — ⁶ see picture, Chapt. XXIV. — ⁷ David, to the accompaniment of his harp, sang holy Psalms composed by himself. As Saul had not, as yet, entirely given himself over to the influence of the evil spirit, his mind was calmed and cheered by David's sacred music, and the consoling words of his canticles.

II. Commentary.

The Omniscience of God. He knows the mind and feelings of man. He knew David better than his own father knew him.

The Wisdom of God. It was by the guidance of divine Providence that, on account of his musical talents, David was summoned to the court of the king who, naturally, had no suspicion that the young shepherd was destined to be his successor. The simple youth, who was then about twenty years old, learnt at court the art of government and the duties of a king, and was thus prepared for his future position.

The Faithfulness of God. Almighty God, by choosing David, of the tribe of Juda, to be king, fulfilled that which He promised by the mouth of the dying Jacob, i. e. that there should be a sceptre in Juda, which should not depart from him till the Messias Himself came.

Obedience. Samuel was obedient to God, for though he was very sorry that Saul was rejected, he obeyed when commanded to anoint another king. David was obedient to his father. He did not murmur at not being included with his brothers in the invitation to the sacrifice, but cheerfully led his flocks into the fields of Bethlehem.

The value of virtue. God rejected the proud Saul, and chose the young and humble David to be his successor. Even David's father, to whom Samuel had confided that one of his sons was chosen to be king, had not the remotest idea that David, the shepherd boy, could be the chosen one. He had not even thought it worth while to keep his youngest son at home, but had sent him with his sheep into the fields. He said to himself: "God will be sure to have chosen one of my elder, fine, warlike sons." But the eyes of God were fixed on the young, modest David, for He does not look to the appearance, but to the heart. David was pious, humble, steadfast, and pure; therefore God loved him, and chose him to be the shepherd of His people. Beauty, fine clothes, riches are nothing in the eyes of God; the only thing that is of value in His sight is a virtuous heart. He who wishes to be well-pleasing to God must strive to be virtuous.

The pious shepherd-boy. David did not waste his time while he was watching his sheep. He prayed and meditated on the attributes of God which were revealed to his holy mind in the works of creation; and in the joy of his heart he composed and sang holy psalms and canticles. The stars of heaven, the flowers of the field, the songs of the birds, all raised his heart to God, and so he lived constantly in God's presence, having God before his eyes and in his heart. By his holy and innocent youth this humble, though highly gifted boy was prepared to be God's chosen instrument.

The pain of a bad conscience. Woe to the man who forsakes God, and who is too proud to do penance for his sins, and return contritely to God! For such an one cannot be happy either now or hereafter. We see this in the case of the God-forsaken Saul. Neither his high position, nor his riches could make him happy, because he had no peace in his heart. His bad conscience gave him no rest; it drove all cheerfulness from his mind, so that he grew discontented and melan-

A choly. "There is no peace for the wicked" (Is. 48, 22). "Tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that worketh evil" (Rom. 2, 9). Man can find true happiness in God alone, i. e. in the love of God and in doing His will.

III. Application.

Do you like thinking about God? Do you pray and work as David did? Do you like to sing sacred canticles? The Psalms which we sing at Vespers were mostly written by David. Assist when you can at Vespers, and sing the Psalms devoutly, as David used to sing them, in honour of God. Never degrade the noble gift of music by singing bad, low songs.

CHAPTER LI.

DAVID FIGHTS WITH AND SLAYS GOLIATH.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

THE Philistines again took the field against the Israelites, and posted themselves on one mountain, and the Israelites were on another. And behold, there was in the camp of the Philistines a giant named Goliath. He was not only taller than any other man¹, but his strength was in proportion to his size. He had a brazen helmet on his head, and was clothed in scaly armour of enormous weight.

He had greaves of brass on his legs, and a brazen shield on his shoulder², and the staff³ of his spear was like a weaver's beam. This giant, clad in armour from head to foot, came daily out, morning and evening, from the Philistine camp, and challenged any one of the Israelites to meet him in single combat, saying: "Give me a man, and let him fight with me hand to hand. If he be able to kill me, we will be servants to you; but if I prevail and kill him, you shall serve us."

This went on for forty days, and there was no one found in all Israel to accept the challenge of Goliath. Hence Saul and the Israelites were in great terror and confusion, because of Goliath and of his proud boasting that he could find no man in Israel to fight him.

¹ He was six cubits and a span, or, in other words, nearly ten feet high. — ² You can see a helmet in the picture, page 264. The greaves, shield and coat of mail are shown on page 259. This last was a strong suit made of leather, covered with brazen scales, through which no spear or arrow-point could pierce. — ³ the wooden shaft of the spear, to which the point was fastened.

Now David, after his three eldest brothers had gone out with Saul to battle, had returned to his father's house. One day his father told him to take bread and go to the camp, and see how it fared with his brothers. Whilst David was conversing with the people, Goliath came out, as usual, from the Philistine camp, and repeated his insulting and contemptuous challenge. Full of surprise, David asked: "What shall be given to the man that slayeth the Philistine, who defieth the army of the living God?"⁴ Now, when Eliab, his eldest brother, heard that David was asking such questions of the soldiers, he grew angry, and said: "Why camest thou hither? Why didst thou leave those few sheep in the desert? I know thy pride and that thou camest down to see the battle."

However, these words were repeated to Saul, who sent for David and said to him: "Thou art not able to withstand this Philistine, for thou art but a boy, and he is a warrior." But David said: "Let no man be dismayed; I, thy servant, will go and fight against the Philistine."

^ "For thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion and a bear and took a ram out of the midst of the flock. And I pursued after them and struck them; and they rose up against me, and I caught them by the throat, and I strangled and killed them. I will go now and take away the reproach of the people. The Lord Who delivered me out of the paw of the lion and the bear, will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine."

At last Saul consented and said: "Go, and the Lord be with thee." Saul then clothed David with his own armour⁵, and put a helmet of brass on his head, and armed him with a coat of mail. But David, unused to wear armour, could not move freely under its weight, and therefore he laid it aside.

Then he took his staff, which he had always in his hands, and chose five smooth stones ⁶ from the brook and put them in the shepherd's scrip which he had with him; and taking a sling in his hand, he went forth to meet the Philistine.

⁴ He is called the living God in contradistinction to the gods of the heathen, which were nothing but dead idols made of wood, brass &c. He is the living God, because He has life in Himself, and is the Author of all life. — ⁵ his coat of mail &c. — ⁶ They had to be smooth, so as to slide easily from the sling.

When Goliath drew near and beheld David coming on, he despised him and said: "Am I a dog that thou comest to me with a staff?" Then cursing David by his gods, he said: "Come to me, and I will give thy flesh to the birds of the air, and to the beasts of the earth."⁷ David answered: "Thou comest to me with a sword, and with a spear, and with a shield; but I come to thee in the name of the Lord of Hosts⁸, Whom thou hast defied⁹. I will slay thee and take away thy head from thee, that all may know that there is a God in Israel."

Meanwhile, the Philistine arose, advanced and made ready for the fight; David, on his part, making haste, ran up to meet the giant. While running, he quickly took a stone from his scrip, laid it in his sling, and fetching it a few times about¹⁰, he aimed and struck Goliath so violently in the forehead, that he reeled and fell on his face upon the earth. Then David, rushing up, and taking Goliath's sword from its scabbard, cut off his head.

The Philistines, seeing that their champion was dead, were seized with fear and fled. But the Israelites, following after, slew a great number of them, and took possession of their camp.

⁷ I will kill you, and leave your body to be eaten by the birds and beasts. — ⁸ Literally, David meant the army of the Israelites, fighting against the idolaters for the glory of God; but in a wider sense his words meant that God is Lord of all the hosts in heaven and on earth. — ⁹ Goliath, by mocking the Israelites, and treating them as if God were powerless to help them, was really defying God. — ¹⁰ By swinging the sling, such velocity was given to the stone cast by it, that even the skull of the giant could not resist



it. But to take aim well and sling truly, great skill and practice are required. David possessed both, and God now gave him the grace not to lose courage or presence of mind, without which he could not have taken a cool and sure aim.

II. Commentary.

Pride. Goliath was arrogant, and trusted in his own strength and mighty weapons. He boasted, sought the single combat for his own glory, and scorned the people of God. This pride was the cause of his fall. "Pride comes before a fall", and "Humiliation followeth the proud, and glory shall uphold the humble of spirit" (Prov. 29, 23).

Humility and confidence in God. David was humble. It was no thought of renown which impelled him to fight the giant, but only zeal for God's glory and the good of his people. He trusted in God's help and not in his own powers or skill, and went forth to the unequal combat, full of the confidence that God would overthrow the Philistine by his means, and would thus manifest His power to the heathen. "The Lord Who delivered me out of the paw of the lion and out of the paw of the bear, He will deliver me out of the hand of this Philistine" (1 Kings 17, 37). God rewarded the humility and confidence of His servant by giving him

a splendid victory over the terrible giant. God wished, by this victory of David, to draw the eyes of the Israelites to his virtues, and to awake in them a feeling of gratitude towards him who was to be their future king.

III. Application.

Do you boast? Are you proud of your fine figure, of your strength, or of your understanding, memory &c? Make a resolution to subdue promptly all such thoughts of self-complacency.

You, too, have a Goliath to overcome, namely your besetting sin. Ask yourself which is your besetting sin, whether anger, envy, pride, sloth &c. Against this sin you must fight, not once, but every day of your life, if you hope to overcome it. Your weapons must be prayer and watchfulness. Pray for the virtue opposed to your besetting sin, and take care to subdue the first movements of this passion.

CHAPTER LII.

FRIENDSHIP OF JONATHAN AND DAVID.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

WHEN David returned from the slaying of the Philistine, Saul called for him and asked: "Young man, of what family art thou?" Then David related all about his family and about himself. Now Jonathan, the eldest son of Saul, was standing by, and listened to the words of David; and when David had made an end of speaking, Jonathan began to love him as his own soul. There was a custom for friends to exchange garments; so Jonathan took his coat and gave it to David. He took his sword, and his bow, and his girdle and gave them also to David.

Now, when David returned home with Saul, after having slain Goliath, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, with flutes and cymbals¹, and they sang: "Saul slew his thousands, and David his ten thousands." Hearing this, Saul was angry, and ever after regarded David as his rival. Next day Saul was again troubled by the evil spirit, and

whilst David played the harp before him, he threw a spear at David, hoping to nail him to the wall.

David, however, stepped aside and avoided the blow. Some time after, David was appointed by Saul captain over a thousand men. He was, moreover, promised Michol, the king's daughter, in marriage, if he killed a hundred Philistines. By this proposal Saul hoped to get rid of David, thinking that he would never be able to fulfil the conditions, but that he would be slain by the Philistines. Saul, however, was disappointed, for David slew two hundred of the enemy, and thereby gained the affection of the whole people. This unexpected success of David enraged Saul more than ever.

¹ On page 270 you can see such cymbals, or plates of brass which the women knocked one against the other.

Blinded by passion, he ordered Jonathan, his son, to kill David. But Jonathan, knowing David's innocence and virtue, and loving him exceedingly, gave warning to him ² and said: "My father seeketh to kill thee; wherefore look to thyself, and abide in a secret place, and thou shalt be hid." David listened to his advice, and remained hidden in the fields ³.

One day, however, when Saul was in a better humour than usual, Jonathan said to him: "Sin not, oh king, against thy servant David, because he has not sinned against thee, and his works are very good towards thee. Why, therefore, wilt thou sin against innocent blood?"

Saul was appeased by these words of Jonathan, and swore that David should not be slain. And Jonathan brought David again into his father's presence, and Saul was gracious to him as he had been before. At this time, however, war was renewed against the Philistines, and David went out against them, and defeated them with great slaughter.

Then the evil spirit came back upon Saul, who tried to pierce David with his spear as he played upon the harp; but David warded off the blow and fled. Jonathan, however, took occasion once again to speak to his father in behalf of David. But Saul was angry and blamed his son for his affection for the son of Isai, who was supplanting him with the people.

He told Jonathan that so long as David lived, he could have no hope of ascending the throne. "Therefore, now presently send and fetch him to me, for he is the son of death." Jonathan asked: "Why shall he die? What hath he done?" And Saul, being enraged at Jonathan, took his spear to strike him. But Jonathan escaped and fled to David's hiding-place, in order to warn him against returning to the court. The two friends then embraced each other, wept together, and before parting, renewed their vow of friendship in the name of God.

² He constantly spoke to his father in defence of his friend, and whenever he could, warned the latter of his danger. — ³ David had from henceforth to live as a fugitive in the mountains, hiding in holes and caves, for nowhere was his life safe.

II. Commentary.

Envy. Saul was avowedly the tallest man in Israel, but he had not the courage to face Goliath, because he had no confidence in God. He ought to have been all the more grateful to David for freeing him and all Israel from this proud and overbearing enemy. But because the people praised David more than they praised himself, he allowed a hateful envy to take possession of his heart. From this time he disliked him, and was suspicious and distrustful of the noble minded David. See how ungrateful and unjust envy makes a man!

True friendship. David and Jonathan were knit together by a real, true, noble friendship. Jonathan loved David for his good qualities, his piety, courage, modesty &c. He loved him "as his own soul", though he knew that David, and not he, was destined to succeed Saul as king. He remained true to his friend in his adversity, and did everything that he could to help him. David responded with all his heart to the love of the king's son. When Jonathan died, David tore his clothes for grief, wept bitterly and expressed his sorrow in the most moving words. A true and noble friend is a great treasure; therefore Holy Scripture says: "Nothing can be compared to a faithful friend, and they that fear the Lord shall find him" (Ecclus. 6, 15. 16). True friendship can only exist between good people. He who is not faithful to God, and does not love and fear Him will only be faithful to his friend as long as he hopes to gain something by his friendship. Friendship and intercourse with the good exercise an ennobling and

elevating influence, but intercourse with the wicked is a great source of danger both to faith and morals. "Evil communications corrupt good manners."

III. Application.

You should be *friendly* with all your schoolfellows, but *make friends* of the good only. How has it been with you hitherto? Have you taken pleasure in being with bad comrades? Many a good child has been corrupted and led into committing grievous sins by associating and making friends with bad children. Therefore, form friendships with only good and well-behaved children, and avoid anything like intimacy with bad children.

CHAPTER LIII.

DAVID'S NOBLE CONDUCT TOWARDS SAUL.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

DAVID, seeing that he could no longer live in safety near Saul, fled to the mountains of Juda. Even there death threatened him on every side, but his courage never forsook him. He consoled himself with the thought that he who places himself under the protection of God, is in safety everywhere, and has nothing to fear. His trust in God was rewarded.

Now the men of Ziph came to Saul and said: "Behold, David is hid in the hill which is over against the wilderness." Immediately Saul arose, having with him three thousand chosen men, and encamped in the way of the wilderness."¹ As soon as David had heard that Saul had come after him, he sent out spies to see where the king had pitched his tents. David, on learning where Saul was, arose and came secretly to the camp of his enemy.

And David said to his followers: "Who will go down with me into the camp of Saul?" Abisai answered: "I will go with thee." So David and Abisai came upon the tents by night, and found Saul sleeping on his couch, and his spear fixed in the ground near his head. Moreover all the soldiers were sleeping about. And Abisai said to David:

"Now, then, I will run thy enemy through with my spear, and there shall be no need of a second time." But David answered: "Kill him not; for who shall put forth his hand against the Lord's anointed, and remain guiltless?² But now, take the spear which is at his head, and the cup of water³ and let us go."

So they took the spear and the cup of water, and went away. And no man knew it, or saw it, or awaked; for a deep sleep from the Lord was fallen upon them. They both went on till they came to the other side, and stood on a hill afar off. Then David called aloud to Abner, the captain of Saul's army and said: "Wilt thou not answer, Abner? Art not thou a man? Why, then, hast thou not kept the



lord thy king? And now where is the king's spear, and the cup of water which was at his head?"

At these words Saul awoke from his sleep and cried out: "Is this thy voice, my son David?" And David answered: "It is my voice, my lord

the king. Wherefore doth my lord persecute his servant? What have I done?" Saul, feeling his own injustice, exclaimed: "I have sinned; return, my son David, for I will no more do thee harm, because my life has been precious in thy eyes this day. Blessed art thou, my son David." Then they parted in peace.

¹ He was on his track and was seeking for him everywhere. —

² He meant that nobody could kill the king, the anointed of the Lord, without committing a grievous sin. — ³ David took them with him, so as to prove to the king that he had been inside his tent, and could have killed him, had he wished to do so. When Saul had acknowledged his injustice, David sent him back the spear and cup.

A short time after this there was a battle fought between

the Israelites and the Philistines on Mount Gelboe⁴. A great number of the Israelites were slain, and amongst them the three sons of Saul. At last the whole weight of the fight turned upon Saul; the archers overtook him and grievously wounded him.

Seeing himself surrounded by the enemy who wished to take him alive, he drew his sword and fell upon it⁵. David was thus delivered from his mortal enemy; yet so far from rejoicing at his death, when he heard the sad news he wept, and forgetting all the injuries he had received, he remembered only the good qualities of the king.

Yea, filled with sorrow, he rent his garments and wept, and cursed the mountain of Gelboe⁶ whereon the king and his three sons had met their death. Then he lamented and made a dirge over Saul and Jonathan: "How are the valiant fallen! Tell it not in Geth; publish it not in the streets of Ascalon. They were swifter than eagles, stronger than lions. I grieve for thee, my brother Jonathan, exceeding amiable. As the mother loveth her only son, so I did love thee." To forgive our enemies is a duty, and those that do not forgive cannot be saved. Yet we must admire the virtue of David, who not only forgave, but loved his enemy tenderly.

⁴ The mountain in which the brook Kison takes its rise. It is south of Naim (see map). — ⁵ so that it pierced his body, and he died in a few moments. The Philistines found his corpse, and cut off his head, which they sent, with his weapons, to their country. The head of the king was set up by his enemies as a token of their victory. Thus humiliating was the end of Saul! — ⁶ "Ye mountains of Gelboe", said he, "let neither dew nor rain come upon you, neither be they fields of first fruits." Their infertility was a token of mourning.

II. Commentary.

The Justice of God. God protected the innocent David and enabled him to escape from the snares of the blood-thirsty king. But He humbled the sin-laden Saul by subjecting him to a humiliating defeat and a premature and dishonourable death.

The Wisdom of God decreed that many troubles should overtake David, in order that he might be exercised in virtue, and prepared for his high position. By the persecutions and privations to which he was subjected, David was confirmed in humility and confidence in God, and experienced for himself how much harm is caused by evil doing. He saw from which faults a ruler should be free, and was thus fitted for the high dignity for which God destined him.

The Fifth Commandment. The story we have just heard is well suited to explain and impress upon us the precepts taught by the fifth Commandment. David observed this Commandment most conscientiously when he would not allow his mortal enemy, Saul, to be killed, although he was in his power. The armour-bearer, Abisai, on the other hand, did sin against the fifth Commandment, because he had the desire to murder Saul in his sleep, and would have carried out his wicked project had David given his consent. By this sinful intention Abisai also sinned against the fourth Commandment, for Saul, the anointed of the Lord, was the representative of God. But it was Saul who sinned most grievously against the fifth Commandment. He allowed his anger against David to grow till it turned to hatred, and from this to blood-thirstiness, which passion Saul cherished in his heart for a long time, and tried to satisfy by his untiring persecution of David. Each fresh desire to get rid of David, and each pursuit of him for that object was a grievous sin.

Suicide was Saul's crowning sin. He saw that the enemy was pressing on him in overwhelming numbers, and that he could not escape; therefore, so as not to fall into the hands of the Philistines, he killed himself. This was a terrible sin, for on no account may a man take away his own life, as he did not give it to himself. God is Lord of life and death, and he who kills himself robs the divine Majesty of His rights. But, it might be argued, Saul could not, anyhow, have had long to live, for, most likely, the Philistines would have killed him on the field of battle. True, but if Saul had, by God's permission, been killed by his enemies,

he would have died the death of a hero, in defence of his religion, his people and his country. Very likely, however, the Philistines would not have killed him at once, but would have taken him prisoner, and would, later, have put him to death. Saul would, in this way, have had to endure humiliations and tortures, but he would have had time to repent of his many sins, and if he offered his sufferings to God in the spirit of true penance, his soul would have been saved, and he would have died the death of a martyr for the faith in the one true God. By his suicide he not only killed his body, but also his soul, for his last act on earth was one of mortal sin, and the very nature of the act made repentance impossible. Every voluntary suicide is a suicide of the soul, which can in no way be expiated; and it is in this that lies the horror of this sin. Cowardice, moreover, lies at the root of every suicide, as we have seen was the case with Saul. He shrank from humiliation and degradation, and, to avoid them, put an end to his life. The suicide is too cowardly to endure such temporal evils as poverty, sickness, or shame, and, therefore, puts an end to his life, never considering that he thereby subjects himself to the everlasting torments of hell. Suicide is a sort of insanity, for he who commits it exposes himself to the greatest of all evils, eternal damnation, to avoid a mere passing evil.

Humility, and love of our enemies. There are many beautiful virtues to admire in David. He remained humble in spite of the adulation of the world; he did not glory in being chosen by God to be king; he bore no grudge in his heart against the unjust, ungrateful Saul; he did not rise up against him, but honoured him as "his lord and king", called himself his servant, forgave him from his heart, and spared his life when the opportunity of revenge was given him. David had a most noble and magnanimous heart; he did not return evil for evil, but really loved his mortal enemy, and bitterly bewailed his sad end. Thus David gives us a splendid example of love of our enemies, which teaches us that we should never take vengeance on them. St. Paul writes (Rom. 12, 19): "Do not revenge yourselves, but give place

unto wrath (i. e. leave vengeance to God), for it is written, 'Revenge to me, I will repay, saith the Lord'." By this noble virtue of love of his enemy David won a victory over himself (over anger and the desire of revenge), which was far greater and more worthy of renown than his victory over Goliath. St. Chrysostom says of him: "Women did not come to meet him, singing the praises of this victory, but the choirs of angels, full of admiration, sang the praises of his magnanimity." Learn, then, how beautiful and praiseworthy it is to overcome yourself and forgive those who have injured you.

Love until death. David loved Saul and Jonathan till they died, and bitterly mourned their death. True love lasts beyond the grave, and we should preserve our love for those dear unto us after they are dead. You should pray for the souls of your departed parents, friends and relations.

Resistance of grace. Learn from the case of Saul how low a man can fall when he forsakes God, resists grace, and gives himself over to his passions. If you give the devil one finger, he will want to have your whole hand, and your whole self. Saul was originally humble, and God was with him, and gave him many graces; but his victories made him proud and disobedient to God. His pride could not endure that David should be so highly honoured and esteemed, and, therefore, he was envious and jealous of David. Envy embittered his life, and made him ungrateful towards David, and this led further to hatred of him and desire for his death. Thus Saul became more and more unworthy of the divine assistance. Quite forsaken by God, he was defeated by the Philistines in spite of his valour, and ended his life by suicide. What a sad end for a man chosen out by God from among all men!

III. Application.

What do you do when any one injures you by word or deed? Do you cherish a grudge against him in your heart? Do you wish evil to any of your comrades? Do you speak evil of him to others? "Forgive and forget!"

THE GREATNESS OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE REIGN OF DAVID TO THAT OF ROBOAM.

(From the year 1055 to 975 B. C.)

CHAPTER LIV.

DAVID'S PIETY.—HIS ZEAL FOR GOD'S GLORY.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

AFTER the death of Saul, David was chosen king. He established his court in Jerusalem¹ where he became renowned for his great valour. He defeated the Philistines and many other nations². His reign was glorious, because he governed his people with justice and clemency. As he feared God, he never imposed on his people any but just and righteous laws³.

The counsellors whom he chose to aid him in the government of his kingdom were not flatterers, but men of wisdom and virtue, whose advice was always founded on reason and justice. The promotion of God's glory was the primary object of all their plans and views.

¹ This, the House of peace, is the Salem of earlier times, of which, in the days of Abraham, Melchisedech was king. The town was divided into two parts, the upper town and the lower town. The lower town had been for some time in the possession of the Israelites, but the upper town, which was built on Mount Sion, still belonged to the heathen Jebusites, who had fortified it so strongly that hitherto no one had been able to conquer it. David now took possession of it, and fortified it even more strongly than it had been. He built himself a palace there, and called it the City of David. From henceforward Jerusalem was the capital of the kingdom. — ² such as the Moabites, Syrians etc. David extended his kingdom on the west as far as the Mediterranean, on the south to the Red Sea, on the east to the deserts of Arabia and Syria, and on the north to the Euphrates. — ³ He settled the principal matters of dispute himself. Besides this, he appointed six thousand Levites to be judges.

Near Jerusalem was Mount Sion on which David erected a splendid tabernacle for the Ark of the Covenant⁴. When the tabernacle was completed, he caused the Ark to be carried in triumph to Mount Sion. The procession was very grand,



comprising all the princes of Israel⁵ in purple robes, the priests in their rich vestments, and thirty thousand armed men. The sound of all manner of musical instruments⁶ made the procession still more imposing. David himself went before the Ark playing on the harp and singing: "Lord, who shall dwell in Thy tabernacle, and who shall rest in Thy holy hill?"

At every few paces taken by the Levites who carried the Ark, an ox and a ram were sacrificed to the Lord. And when the Ark had been placed in its destined position, a great number of victims were offered. David then divided the priests into several classes, who were in turn to officiate in the divine worship. He established a like order amongst the Levites, four thousand of whom were chosen to sing the praises of the Most High.

⁴ The new tabernacle was made on the model of the old one constructed under the direction of Moses, and which was worn out on account of its great age. — ⁵ the ancients of the tribes and the leaders of the army. — ⁶ See picture. Some blew trumpets, others beat little drums with their hands, others clashed cymbals, some

played on metal triangles, while others played on stringed instruments, such as harps and zitherns.

II. Commentary.

133 Religion, the foundation of all government. David was, therefore, a wise as well as a holy ruler. He knew that a nation cannot be happy and contented, nor rights and laws be respected, unless religion be observed, and God feared. Hence, as far as lay in his power, he furthered religion. He arranged the solemn services of God, and he kindled the hearts of the people and awakened their religious sense by his sacred music and psalms. Above all, he himself gave them a holy example of piety and reverence. He did not shrink from openly confessing his faith; he publicly humbled himself before God and danced in front of the Ark of the Covenant, singing and playing on the harp.—In reward for David's care and zeal for His glory, God gave him the victory over all his enemies, increased his kingdom, and promised him that the Redeemer should be born of his race, and should found and possess an everlasting kingdom.

The First Commandment. David was a shining example to high and low by his zeal for God's glory. His heart was holy, he had a living faith, firm confidence in God, an interior love for Him, and he expressed all these holy dispositions in his wonderful Psalms. By these Psalms (some of which are sung at Vespers) he not only edified the Israelites of his own time, but he has edified all the faithful for 3000 years, moving them to worship God.

Religious Processions, which the Church has instituted, give us an opportunity of outwardly confessing our faith and of honouring God. In the procession formed by David, the Ark of the Covenant, held most sacred by the Israelites, was carried. We have far more holy processions, in which the Lawgiver of the New Testament, Jesus Christ Himself, present in the Blessed Sacrament, is carried, for our veneration and adoration.

Joy in the House of God. David rejoiced and exulted that now the Ark would be close to his dwelling on Mount Sion, and that he would be able to assist at the sacrifices. How much more ought we to rejoice and thank God that in our midst are real houses of God, where we can visit our Divine Lord, and assist at the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

III. Application.

Do you like saying your prayers? Do you take pleasure in the services of God? How do you behave in Church, and during processions? Do you give a good example to others, or do you disturb them in their devotions?

CHAPTER LV.

THE PROPHECIES OF DAVID.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

DAVID, as he had done when only a simple shepherd-boy, composed Psalms and Canticles in honour of the Most High¹, and conducted himself in all things according to the holy will of God. Wherefore the Lord blessed him, and not only favoured all his undertakings, but promised him that one of his descendants should rule the whole world, and sit upon a throne more lasting than the heavens.

He furthermore endowed him with the gift of prophecy. He expresses in lofty and sublime language the eternal relationship existing between the Father and the Son: "Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee." He foreshadows the boundless dominion which was to be the inheritance of the Redeemer, and the peaceful character of his reign. "I will give Thee the gentiles for Thy inheritance, and the utmost parts of the earth for Thy possession. In His days shall justice spring up, and the abundance of peace."²

He sees, in his prophetic visions, the Ethiopians falling down before the great Ruler, the Prince of Peace, and beholds His enemies prostrate at His feet. He sees the kings of Tharsis and of the Islands offering Him presents; the kings of the Arabians and of Saba bringing Him gifts.

¹ These were written by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, Who even revealed to the Royal Prophet the future of the kingdom of God. There are, in all, one hundred and fifty Psalms, which form one of the books of Holy Scripture. Most of the Psalms are songs of praise; some are petitions; and seven are called the penitential Psalms. — ² i. e. virtue and holiness will flourish and, in consequence, men will live in perfect peace both with God and with their neighbours. The Psalmist goes on to say: "And He shall rule from sea

to sea. And all the kings of the earth shall adore Him, all nations shall serve Him."

He foretells the future crucifixion, with all the sorrowful scenes and circumstances³. "They have pierced my hands and my feet, they have numbered all my bones." The gall and vinegar that were presented to the Divine Victim suffering and dying on the Cross; the lance that pierced His most Sacred Heart; the nails that held Him fast to the Cross; all these are mentioned by David in his Psalms⁴.

³ The Divine Redeemer spoke to the spirit of David, and it was as if the Psalmist heard him say these and the other words. — ⁴ "I am a worm and no man (i. e. down-trodden and despised like a worm)", says our Saviour through the mouth of David, "the reproach of men and the outcast of the people. All they that saw me have laughed me to scorn, they have spoken with the lips and wagged their heads (in token of their scorn). They have pierced my hands and my feet. They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture they cast lots."

Death overcome, the grave robbed of its prey⁵, the earthquake that rent the rocks of Calvary, and the glory of the Resurrection, were all and each familiar to the mind of the royal prophet.

He sees in the distant future the brightness of the Ascension. He calls upon the eternal gates to be lifted up, that the triumphant Conqueror of sin and death may take possession of His everlasting throne in heaven⁶. David, the progenitor, or forefather of Jesus Christ⁷, Who is Himself called the Son of David, was a figure of the Redeemer by the place of his birth, Bethlehem, by the obscurity and lowliness of his early years, by the victories he obtained over the enemies of the people of God, and also by his twofold character of king and prophet.

⁵ "My flesh also shall rest in hope (in the grave); because Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell (i. e. in Limbo), nor wilt Thou give Thy Holy One (He who is anointed by Thee) to see corruption (to experience it in His own body)." — ⁶ "The Lord said to my Lord (to David's Lord, the Messias): 'Sit thou at my right hand until I make thine enemies thy footstool (till all thine enemies are overthrown).' The Lord hath sworn and He will not repent: 'Thou art a priest for ever according to the order of Melchisedech (who was

both priest and king, and offered an unbloody sacrifice of bread and wine)." — ⁷ God said to David: "I will raise up thy seed after thee, and I will establish the throne of His kingdom for ever (to last for all eternity). I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to me a Son."

II. Commentary.

The eighth promise of the Messias. David lived more than a thousand years before our Lord's birth. (He reigned from 1055 to 1015 B. C.) But the Spirit of God, to Whom a thousand years are but as one day, inspired his spirit and enabled him to look forward over centuries, and contemplate the sufferings and glory of the Redeemer.

1. *The prophecies about our Lord's Sufferings* have been very literally fulfilled (see Chapters LXXIII and LXXIV, New Test.). It amazes us that the prophet, writing 1000 years before our Lord suffered, should have described such details as the piercing of His Hands and Feet, the division of His garments, the casting lots for the seamless robe, the scoffing and wagging of the head on the part of the by-standers! This foretelling of future events was only possible by means of divine revelation.

2. *About the Resurrection, David prophesied* that our Lord's soul would descend to Limbo, but would not stay there; and that His body would rest in the grave, but would not know corruption ("He descended into hell; the third day He rose again from the dead").

3. *Alluding to our Lord's glory in heaven, and His kingdom, the Psalmist says* that He will sit at the right hand of God ("He ascended into heaven, sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty").

His enemies will be overcome: the doctrines of Christianity have overcome paganism.

He will remain for ever a King and Priest, offering an unbloody sacrifice: Jesus Christ is King of that kingdom which He founded, and He offers Himself in an unbloody manner in the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass.

His reign will bring justice and peace: Jesus Christ has justified us and reconciled us to God by the grace which He has won for us; at His birth the angels proclaimed peace to men.

He will rule over the whole earth: Jesus Christ's kingdom, i. e. His Church, is spread over the whole world, and is ever being spread further and further.

Finally the Psalmist says that *the Redeemer will be of the seed of David*, and that He will be likewise the Son of God, and will rule for ever: therefore David calls Him his Lord. Jesus Christ is the Son of God from all eternity, and in time He took our human nature on Him. According to His human nature, He was descended from David, for His holy Mother was of the race of David. (Compare what the Angel Gabriel said at the Annunciation. Chapt. II, New Test.).

III. Application.

David's example teaches us to worship God from our hearts; to assist at the services of God with holy joy, and, according to our capabilities, to work for their adornment by singing &c. &c.

CHAPTER LVI.

REVOLT AND PUNISHMENT OF ABSALOM.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

EVEN David was not sufficiently on his guard against temptations. He unhappily fell into two grievous sins. He took to himself Bethsabee, the wife of Urias¹, one of his captains, and in order to conceal his sin he caused Urias to be slain by exposing him for that purpose in the front of the battle. The Lord sent the prophet Nathan² to reproach David with his double crime³. David full of contrition, confessed his fault and asked pardon of the Lord. He then composed the seven penitential psalms, which ever since have been the consolation of all truly penitent sinners.

The Lord, seeing the sorrow of David, ordered Nathan to tell him that his sin was forgiven, but that, nevertheless, he must undergo many temporal punishments⁴, and that the child that was about to be born to him should die. David, humbling himself before God, willingly accepted this and many other punishments inflicted upon him, and added, on his own part, the most severe penance in expiation of his sins.

¹ This valiant captain in the army was very devoted to the king's service. — ² a holy man, inspired by God. — ³ Nathan recalled to the king's mind all the benefits which God had bestowed upon him, in order to lead him to perceive and confess his shameful ingratitude towards God. — ⁴ chiefly at the hands of his own children.

The most terrible chastisement inflicted on David was the ingratitude of his son Absalom. Now Absalom was endowed with rare beauty of person, so that from the top of his head to the sole of his foot there was no blemish in him⁵. His hair was long and very beautiful. And David gave Absalom a princely retinue of chariots and horsemen, and a guard of young men to accompany him everywhere.

Absalom was wont to rise early in the morning and stand at the gate of the palace, and when any man presented himself to ask justice of the king, he kindly inquired what complaint he had to make, and on hearing it always replied: "Thy words seem good and just to me; but there is no one appointed by the king to hear thy cause." In this manner he made friends for himself among the people by wrongfully blaming his father.

Sometimes he would exclaim in the hearing of these people: "O that they would make me judge over the land, that all who have business might come to me, that I might do them justice!" Moreover when any man came to salute him, he put forth his hand, and took him and kissed him. Thus he enticed the hearts of the men of Israel⁶.

When he thought he had gained over all the men of Israel to his side, he asked his father to let him go to Hebron in fulfilment of a vow. David, suspecting no evil, allowed his son to depart. And when Absalom had reached Hebron, he sent messengers to all the tribes of Israel, telling them that when they heard the sound of a trumpet, they should say: "Absalom reigneth in Hebron." And it came to pass that many of the people, not knowing his treachery, followed Absalom⁷.

When David heard of Absalom's revolt, he determined to leave the city, lest the citizens should suffer on his account. And having left the city with his attendants, he came to

the brook Cedron⁸, his feet bare, and his head veiled. And crossing the brook, he came to Mount Olivet, where he wept for the guilt of his unnatural son, and for his own sins. And on the side of Mount Olivet he was met by a man named Semei, of the family of Saul, who threw stones and earth at David, and cursed him: "Come out, come out, thou man of blood." Abisai, full of wrath, cried out: "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? I will go and cut off his head." But David answered: "Behold, my own son seeketh my life; how much more one of the house of Saul! Perhaps the Lord may look upon my affliction and render me good for the cursing of this day." He saw the hand of God in this new trial.

⁵ That is to say, there was no flaw in his personal beauty. —

⁶ by flattering the people, and making himself familiar with them, he won their hearts, and gave it to be understood that if he were king, it would be all the better for them. Thus, by degrees, he gathered round him a large number of adherents. — ⁷ He marched on Jerusalem to take it, in order to seize the person of his father and take possession of the throne. — ⁸ which flowed in a deep valley to the east of the town, between it and the Mount of Olives, being crossed by a bridge. Picture to yourselves the aged king ascending the Mount of Olives, bare-foot, weeping and with his head covered, a fugitive before his own son. How grieved he must have felt at the faithlessness of his people and the unnatural conduct of his son! How weary the way must have been to him!

Absalom, having resolved to destroy David and his army, went in pursuit of them. David, however, reviewed his men, and placed brave captains in command, and said that he would himself march at their head. But this his men would not permit, saying that if ten thousand of them fell in battle, they would not despair; but that if he perished, all was lost. The king therefore remained in the city of Mahanaim, but he commanded Joab and his other officers, saying: "Spare me the boy Absalom." ⁹

The battle was fought in the midst of a great wood, and Absalom's army was cut to pieces¹⁰. He himself fled, but he could not escape from divine justice, which pursues the wicked wherever they go. Having mounted a mule, he endeavoured to escape through the forest, but his long hair having

become entangled in a tree, he remained hanging from a branch, while his mule passed on.

And word was brought to Joab, general of the king's army. Joab, taking three javelins, went to the place where Absalom was hanging from the tree, and with his javelins pierced the ungrateful, unnatural heart of the king's son. Absalom still breathed and struggled for life, when some of Joab's soldiers, running up, slew him with their swords. They then took Absalom's body, and casting it into a deep pit in the forest, piled over it a large heap of stones¹¹.

A herald was sent to David with news of Absalom's defeat. David, with the anxiety of a loving father, asked: "Is Absalom safe?"



When told that Absalom was dead, the king refused all comfort, and going up into a high chamber, mourned his ungrateful son for many days. "Absalom, my son," he cried, "my son Absalom, who

would grant me that I might die for thee, Absalom, my son, my son Absalom!"

The people of Jerusalem, hearing of David's victory, went out to meet him, and carried him in triumph into the city. David, in his crossing the brook Cedron, in sorrow and tribulation, in his ascent of Mount Olivet, in his patient forbearance when outraged and insulted by Semei, and his triumphant entry into Jerusalem, presents a very striking figure of Christ.

⁹ "Spare his life: do not kill him." — ¹⁰ About 20 000 of his adherents perished. — ¹¹ As a monument of his infamy, this memorial might well have had written over it: "Here lies one worthy of being stoned!"

II. Commentary.

The Omniscience of God. God knew of David's secret adultery, and He knew that he was guilty of the death of Urias.

The Omnipresence of God. Nathân said to David: "Thus saith the Lord: Why hast thou done evil in my sight?"

God is Good; therefore the prophet said to the king: "The Lord has done good to thee."

God is Merciful; for He forgave David his grievous sin: "The Lord has taken away thy sin".

God is Holy; therefore David's sin was "displeasing to the Lord".

God is Just. The sentence which God pronounced on David, through Nathan, was this: "I will raise up evil against thee out of thy own house", and "The child that is born to thee shall surely die." Both sentences were executed, and David suffered anguish of soul.

The Sixth and Ninth Commandments. When David looked on the wife of Urias, instead of at once turning his eyes from her and thinking of God's Commandment: "Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife", he allowed his evil desire to grow in his heart. Then, instead of resisting this sinful desire, and calling on God for help against the temptation, he consented to it, and sending for the woman, induced her to be unfaithful to her husband. He thus sinned against the ninth and sixth Commandments; and also against the fifth, by leading the woman to do what was wrong. Even this was not all, for his adultery led him to commit the further sin of murder. But did David kill Urias? Not directly, but his urgent command was the cause of his death, so that he really killed him by the hands of the Amorrhites, as much as the Jews really crucified our Lord by the hands of the pagan soldiers.

Tepidity. How did it happen that the royal prophet fell into this grievous sin? He had become tepid in prayer, and was living a comfortable life at home, while he sent his captains out to fight against the unbelievers. His fall gives us a useful lesson against laxity in the spiritual life; and

teaches us that we should keep a careful watch over our eyes and turn them away from anything that awakes evil desires in our hearts: "Watch ye (over your senses and the movements of your hearts) and pray, that ye enter not into temptation (New Test. LXVII)." "He that thinketh himself to stand (firm in what is right), let him take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10, 12).

The evil of mortal sin. In order that David might see the enormity of his sin, Nathan put before him: 1. that he had sinned in the sight of God, and 2. that he had repaid with the basest ingratitude all the benefits which God had showered upon him.

True penance. David was not a hardened, obstinate sinner. He opened his heart to God's grace, and listened to the voice of his conscience which day and night reproached him for his sin. He thus speaks in Psalm 30: "Day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me. I am turned in my anguish, whilst the thorn is fastened." Then, by God's merciful command, the prophet Nathan went to the powerful king and reminded him of God's great benefits, candidly pointing out to him his grievous and twofold sin. David, quite crushed, fell upon his knees, penitently confessed his sin, without excusing himself as Saul did, and prayed for pardon. He did public penance, bewailed his sin (Ps. 6, 7: "Every night I water my couch with my tears"), fasted and grieved, so that his sight failed him. During this period of contrite conversion he composed the penitential Psalms, in which he expressed his repentance in moving words, and humbly asked for pardon. Then Nathan went to him again and told him that God had forgiven him, though he would still have to suffer temporal punishment. From that time forward David met with many sufferings and misfortunes, which he bore patiently in expiation of his sin. Contrition, confession and satisfaction are the principal parts of penance and the necessary conditions of absolution.

Temporal punishment. Although the sin and its eternal punishment were remitted, David had still to suffer temporal punishment.

The Fourth Commandment. Absalom sinned grievously against this Commandment, by violating the laws of obedience and reverence which he owed David, as a son to his father, and as a subject to his king. For, firstly, he spoke evil of his father, deeply grieved him and caused him to shed tears of anguish, and not only disobeyed him, but set himself up actively against him. Secondly, he wantonly blamed the king's mode of government, and, arms in hand, rebelled against the anointed of the Lord. He also sinned against the fifth Commandment by inducing a number of the people to revolt against their lawful head.

The punishment for breaking the Fourth Commandment. Absalom's unnatural and profligate conduct towards a father so worthy of love, met with the punishment which it deserved. A terrible fate awaited Absalom. He did not perish in battle, for very early in the day he thought of saving his own life, and took to flight. He believed he could escape from his pursuers; but, by God's providence, his head caught in a tree and there, full of deadly fear, he hung mid air till Joab came and pierced his ungrateful, disobedient heart. He had hoped to be raised to the throne, but he met with the death of a criminal. His hair, of which he was so proud, and which he had hoped to adorn with a royal crown, caught in the branch of a tree and brought him to his ruin. Instead of the sceptre which he had tried to grasp, three spears transfixed his traitorous heart. Instead of being crowned with the honour and renown he had coveted, he was buried in a dishonourable grave and his memory laden with infamy. In him God fulfilled His words: "Cursed be he who honoureth not his father and mother"; and this curse will fall on all those children who despise and injure their parents, or cause them anguish of heart by their defiance and disobedience. How will it have fared with Absalom in the next world? For not only his father's tears, but the blood of the 20 000 slain, whom he induced to sin by his flatteries and promises, and finally led to their death, will have accused him before God, and cried out for vengeance.

The love of parents for their children. David's love for

his thankless son never changed. "O, that I had died for thee!" he cried. Parents often love their children much more than they deserve, therefore it is all the more heartless and ungrateful of children to injure their parents.

Gentleness and patience under suffering. It grieved David deeply that his own son should come out against him as a mortal enemy. His heart bled, and he shed bitter tears when he thought of the ingratitude and impiety of his child, the faithlessness of his people, and the misery which this civil war kindled by Absalom would bring on his country. He neither complained nor murmured, nor did he curse his wicked son; but he bore all the suffering and injustice with patience and gentleness, saying to himself: "I have deserved all these misfortunes, for I have grievously sinned against God." Thus we too ought to do penance for our sins, by patience under suffering.

Love of our enemies. Even as God forgave David his sin, so did David forgive those who sinned and rebelled against him. "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us." He who forgives from his heart is like unto the merciful God. There is something noble, nay, something divine, in forgiving and forgetting.

Pride, the source of many sins. The great sins of which Absalom was guilty sprang from pride. The beauty of his person, and especially of his hair, made him vain and conceited. Being the most beautiful, he wished also to be the first man in the kingdom. He therefore rebelled against his royal father, and led his people into a revolt which cost many thousand lives.

The value of virtue. Do you like Absalom? No? and why not? He was a handsome young man, behaved very politely and courteously to the people, and knew perfectly how to say nice and pleasant things; so why do you not like him? Because he had a false, bad heart; and was a flatterer and a hypocrite. So you see that however handsome and pleasant a man may be, if he has a proud, bad heart, he is neither loveable nor worthy of respect, but, on the contrary, hateful and despicable in the eyes of God and man. It is only virtue which can give real worth to a man.

III. Application.

David is the model of a truly penitent man. Though he was a king he humbly accepted Nathan's reproaches, and contritely confessed his sin. Are you ashamed to make a sincere confession of your sins? He, an Israelite, bitterly repented and bewailed his sin: you are a Christian, but where are your tears of repentance? This very day say one of the penitential Psalms as a prayer!

Keep a guard on your eyes; they are the windows of your soul. Drive any bad thought from your heart at once. Say: "Away with it!" and pray for help. Nathan's words to David: "The Lord has done good to you: why have you done evil in His sight?" apply to you as well as to David.

Has your mother ever shed tears on your account? Have you ever injured, or grieved, or seriously irritated your father? In what way do you most grieve your parents? Have you truly repented of all sins committed against the fourth Commandment? Has your conduct towards your parents improved? Do you obey them at once and without arguing; or is it only when they scold and are angry that you obey? Children, I wish for everything that is most good for you; that everything may be well with you on earth, and that you may be eternally happy in heaven. Therefore because I wish this, I say most earnestly to you: "Honour and love your parents, and obey them, or else you will know no happiness on earth, and never get to heaven." Woe to those children who do not observe the fourth Commandment!

CHAPTER LVII.

DAVID'S LAST WORDS.—HIS DEATH.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

DAVID was thirty years old when he ascended the throne of Israel, and he reigned forty years in honour and glory. When the time of his death drew near, he gathered together the princes of Israel, and told them that he had intended to build a house to the Lord, and had prepared all the materials for a new Temple; but that the Lord had not

allowed him to carry out his plan, because he had shed much blood in his many battles.

The building of the Temple was reserved for Solomon, his son¹, whose kingdom should be great and powerful if he would be faithful to the Commandments of God. David, therefore, exhorted his son to serve God with a good will, because the Lord sounds the depths of hearts, and penetrates the thoughts of men. "If thou seek Him," said David, "thou shalt find Him; but if thou forsake Him, He will cast thee off for ever."

David then gave his son gold and silver for the vessels of the Sanctuary², together with the plan of the Temple and its precincts, and said to him: "All these things came to me written by the hand of the Lord³. Act like a man, take courage and fear not; for the Lord my God will be with thee, nor forsake thee till thou hast finished the House of the Lord."

¹ Solomon was decreed by God Himself to be David's successor. His name signifies Prince of Peace. — ² which he had saved from the booty taken in war, and from the income of his own possessions. There were 3000 talents of gold, and 7000 talents of silver. — ³ "God has so put into my mind." As on a former occasion God gave Moses instructions as to the making of the Tabernacle (Chapt. XXXVIII), so now He made known to David the plan on which He desired the Temple to be built, because the Temple was to be the type of the Church of the New Testament.

Then, addressing the assembled princes, David said: "The work is great⁴; for a house is prepared not for man, but for God. Now, if any man is willing to offer, let him fill his hand to-day, and offer what he pleaseth to the Lord." And the princes and the people joyfully brought their gifts for the Temple of the Lord⁵.

And David, rejoicing, exclaimed: "Blessed art Thou, O Lord, the God of Israel, our Father from eternity to eternity. All things are Thine, and we have given Thee what we received of Thy hand. O Lord, keep forever this will of their heart, and let this mind remain always for the worship of Thee; and give to Solomon, my son, a perfect heart, that he may keep Thy Commandments." Having thus spoken, David slept in peace⁶. He was buried in Sion.

⁴ The work of building the House of God. — ⁵ As formerly their forefathers had eagerly brought of their wealth, for the making of the Tabernacle (Chapt. XXXVIII), so now did they joyfully bring splendid offerings with which to build a worthy Temple for the Lord. — ⁶ He had reigned forty years, and, as he was thirty years old when he began to reign, he was seventy when he died.

II. Commentary.

God's Omniscience. David said to Solomon: "Serve God with a perfect heart, for the Lord searcheth all hearts and thoughts of the soul."

God's Holiness. God, indeed, forgave David his sin, but all the same He told him that he should not build Him a Temple, because he was a man of blood.

God's Justice. "If thou forsake God," said David to Solomon, "He will cast thee off for ever."

The end of David's life. The last days of the royal prophet's life were beautiful and edifying. His only care was that a fitting Temple should be raised to the Lord, and he urged his son most earnestly to be faithful and obedient to God. And then he slept "in the Lord", i. e. in the grace of the Lord. He was able to gaze back on his active and eventful life, and leave it with the thought that he had finished his task. The task which God had given the former shepherd to do was a great one, and one very important for the development of God's kingdom upon earth. David had secured to the chosen people their possession of the Promised Land, he had disabled his enemies for a long time to come, he had strengthened the unity of the people, ordered the government of the country according to God's laws, extirpated the remnants of idolatry, and advanced the worship of God by his regulations concerning it, by his example and his ever-beautiful Psalms. His prophecies concerning the Messiah had quickened the spiritual life of the people, and turned their thoughts to the source of grace. He was a chosen instrument of God, and, with the exception of his fall, of which he deeply repented, he lived a life well-pleasing to Him. God, therefore, gave him the grace of perseverance and of a happy death.

A retrospect of David's virtues: humility, confidence in God, piety, zeal for God's glory, patience, love of his enemies, justice, generosity, and fatherly care of his subjects. The Holy Ghost says about him (Ecclus. 47, 10): "With his whole heart he praised the Lord, and loved the God Who made him." He is rightly counted among the saints of the Old Testament, and is still venerated by the Church.

David, the twelfth type of Jesus Christ. David not only foretold the sufferings and glory of the Redeemer, but was himself a type of Him. He was born at Bethlehem; he led a hidden life during his youth; and conquered Goliath with a contemptible weapon (Jesus overcame Satan by means of the despised Cross). He was persecuted by Saul, to whom he had done nothing but good, he was patient, and full of love towards his enemies. He was both prophet and king; he ascended the Mount of Olives, crossing the brook Cedron, bowed down with grief; and returned triumphantly to Jerusalem (the type of the Ascension), having gained the victory over his enemies ("sitteth at the right hand of God").

The end of man. When Solomon was anointed king, in his father's lifetime, David said to him: "Serve God with a perfect heart and willing mind." When he was dying, he thus exhorted him: "Keep the charge of the Lord thy God to walk in His ways, as is written in the law of Moses." All men, whatever their age or position may be, have one end to live for, namely to love God and serve Him by a faithful observance of His law.

The four last things. The journey of life leads to death. High and low, rich and poor, we must all die. And after death come the judgment and an eternity, either of joy in heaven or of misery in hell.

Offerings for the House of God. In Psalm 25, David says: "I have loved, O Lord, the beauty of Thy house, and the place where Thy glory dwelleth." He made rich offerings to the Temple which was to be built to the Lord, and his example fired the people to make generous gifts for the same purpose. He who loves God will gladly make offerings to Him for the building and decorating of His churches, and for the beautifying of His worship. What we give

for such an object is given to God. "Give to the Lord," said David, when he asked for stones wherewith to build the Temple.

III. Application.

Take to heart David's exhortations to Solomon, as much as if they had been made to yourself. Be steadfast! Hitherto you have been very inconstant. Observe everything which the Lord has commanded. On what point do you generally and chiefly transgress God's law? Pray to-day for the grace of steadfastness!

CHAPTER LVIII.

SOLOMON'S PRAYER.—HIS WISDOM.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

AFTER the death of David, Solomon ascended the throne¹. He loved the Lord, and walked in the ways of David, his father. The Lord appeared to him in a dream by night, and told him to ask any favour he wished, and that it would be granted. Solomon answered: "O Lord God, Thou hast made Thy servant² king instead of David, my father, and I am but a child³. Give therefore to Thy servant an understanding heart to judge Thy people, and discern between good and evil."

The Lord was pleased with his petition, and He said to him: "Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life, nor riches, nor the lives of thy enemies, but hast asked for thyself wisdom to discern judgment, behold! I have done for thee according to thy words, and have given thee a wise and understanding heart, insomuch that there hath been no one like thee before thee, nor shall arise after thee.

"Yea, and the things, also, which thou didst not ask, I have given thee: riches and glory, so that no one hath been like thee among the kings in all days heretofore. And if thou wilt walk in my ways, and keep my precepts and commandments, as thy father walked, I will lengthen thy days." And Solomon became renowned for wisdom, and for power and glory.

¹ He began to govern as king, having been anointed during his father's lifetime. — ² I who am so unworthy. — ³ Solomon, when he began to reign, was only twenty years old.

On one occasion two women came to Solomon, asking him to decide their dispute. The first woman said: "We were living alone in a house, only we two. Now I had a child, and she had a child; and in the night when she was asleep, she overlaid her child, and it died.

"And rising in the dead of the night, she took my child, while I, thy handmaid, was asleep, and laid her dead child in my bosom. When I arose in the morning, behold, my child was dead; but considering him more diligently when it was clear day, I found that it was not mine." Then the second woman answered: "It is not so as thou sayest, but thy child is dead and mine is alive."

But the first woman insisted that the living child was hers, and so they disputed before the king⁴. Then Solomon ordered a sword to be brought to him, and when it was brought he said: "Divide the living child in two, and give half to the one and half to the other."⁵ Hearing this, the woman whose child was alive, being moved to pity, cried out in terror: "I beseech thee, my lord, give her the child alive, and do not kill it." But the other said: "Let it be neither mine nor thine, but divide it."⁶

Then the king commanded the child to be given to her who would rather give it up to another than have it killed, knowing that she must be its mother. The report of this judgment having gone abroad, the people all feared the king, and knew that the wisdom of God was in him⁷. How necessary it is that kings and rulers should examine in the spirit of justice and wisdom all cases brought before them!

⁴ The dispute between the women was hard to decide, because no witnesses could be called. — ⁵ The king gave this command because he had the foresight to know that by it he would find out the true mother, and that there would be no question of its being really carried out. He rightly judged that the maternal heart of the woman would move her rather to give up her child than see it killed. ⁶ By this hard-hearted speech Solomon knew at once that the speaker was not the mother of the living child. — ⁷ i. e. that the young



king had not settled the difficult question thus skilfully and decisively by his own natural ability, but by a supernatural inspiration of God. Without this inspiration it would not have occurred to Solomon to find out the true mother in such a peculiar way.

II. Commentary.

God's Goodness to Solomon was wonderful. What gifts did He bestow and what promises did He make the young king?

Love of God and our neighbour. Solomon, by his great virtues, had made himself worthy of God's gifts and graces. He loved God above everything, and served Him with a willing heart. Moreover, he loved his people and was full of zeal for their good. He therefore prayed to God to give him the gift of wisdom to enable him to govern his people well, and provide for their spiritual and temporal welfare.

His humility was most pleasing to God. He showed it by his words: "Thou hast made Thy servant king, who am but a child." In him were fulfilled the words: "To the meek God will give grace" (Prov. 3, 34).

Prayer for spiritual gifts. Solomon's prayer was pleasing to God because, firstly, he made it with a humble heart; and, secondly, because he did not pray for riches or long life, but for far higher gifts. This shows us that we must not pray only for temporal blessings, such as health, or a good harvest, or peace, and so forth, but above all for higher and more precious gifts, such as the forgiveness of sins, virtue, and especially for the grace to do our duty in our own state of life. In the "Our Father", the pattern-prayer taught us by our Lord, there are five petitions for spiritual gifts, and only two for temporal gifts, the fourth, and the seventh, even these two being combined with spiritual petitions. Bear in mind our Lord's exhortation and promise: "Seek ye, therefore, first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you" (New Test. XXI).

Envy. The woman who accidentally smothered her baby, was a bad woman with no conscience. She envied the happiness of the other woman whose child was living, and would have liked the innocent baby to be killed in order that the other woman might be childless as well as herself. This shows what a cruel and hateful sin envy is.

Lies. The envious woman told the most barefaced lies in order to gain possession of the living child.

Mortal sin. The envious woman lied about a serious matter, for her object was to rob a mother of her child; and, therefore, her lie was a mortal sin. She sinned not only against the eighth Commandment, but also against the tenth and fifth Commandments, for, in the first place, she coveted the child which was its mother's dearest earthly possession, and then desired its death. All these sins proceeded from the hateful sin of envy.

The gift of wisdom. The first and highest of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and the crown of all the others, is the gift of wisdom. God gave Solomon this gift in an extraordinary measure. Not only did he possess a knowledge of divine things, but he was versed in all human sciences, knowing the secrets of nature, the course of the stars, and the properties of beasts, plants &c. Moreover, he was gifted with the art of government; and the renown of his wisdom spread far and wide, as you will see in Chapter LX.

III. Application.

Do you pray mostly for spiritual or temporal gifts? In future pray more diligently for God's grace, and especially for the seven gifts of the Holy Ghost. Pray also for the gift of the virtue most opposed to your besetting sin.

CHAPTER LIX.

THE BUILDING AND CONSECRATION OF THE TEMPLE.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

IN the fourth year of his reign, Solomon began to build the Temple of the Lord on Mount Moria¹ in Jerusalem. He had ten thousand men employed cutting cedars on Mount Lebanon². Seventy thousand were engaged in carrying the materials to the site of the Temple. Eighty thousand were hewing stones, while three thousand three hundred were employed as overseers of the work.

The vast number of persons employed corresponded with the grandeur and magnificence of the house of God, the general plan of which was that of the Tabernacle³. In other respects, however, the Tabernacle could not be compared with the Temple, which was sixty cubits long, twenty cubits wide, and thirty cubits high. The house was built of stones hewed and made ready, so that when it was in building, neither hammer nor any iron tool was heard. Then there were, besides, porches and galleries running all around it, and two large courts for the priests and the people⁴.

The porch before the Temple was twenty cubits in length, and ten cubits in breadth. The inner walls were lined with planks of cedar, on which were carved cherubim and palm-trees, and divers blooming flowers, all standing out, as it were, from the wall, so skilfully were they carved. All the furniture⁵, including ten tables and ten candlesticks, were of the purest gold. The walls and floor of the Holy of Holies were covered with plates of fine gold, fastened by nails of gold.

¹ On which mountain Abraham had built an altar, and prepared to sacrifice his son (Chapt. XIII). It is situated to the north-east of Mount Sion, being separated from it by a valley. — ² See map. The cedar is the king of the pine-tribe; its wood is durable, sweet smelling, and does not get worm eaten. The great stones which were necessary for the building of the Temple, also came from Lebanon. The materials for building were taken to the sea-coast, at either Tyre or Sidon, there put on vessels or rafts, and taken to Joppe, and thence to Jerusalem. — ³ which is described in Chapter XXXVIII. — ⁴ the inner one for the priests, and the outer one for the people. The outer court was surrounded by high walls, on the inner side of which were built houses, several stories high, to serve as dwellings for the priests and Levites. In the inner, or priests', court were the altar of holocausts, and the great laver which on account of its enormous size was called "the molten sea". It measured ten cubits across, and contained 10,000 gallons of water. — ⁵ also the table of proposition, besides cans, platters, and thuribles, which were all made of pure gold.

When, after seven years, Solomon had finished the Temple, he assembled all the ancients of Israel, with the princes of the tribes, to carry the Ark of the Covenant in triumph to the Temple. And all the people⁶ marched before the Ark in an ecstasy of joy and religious fervour, making peace-offerings to the Lord at every step they took. The Levites played on the harp and cymbal and many other instruments of music, while a hundred and twenty priests sounded the trumpet.

And the multitude sang in one grand chorus: "Praise the Lord, for He is good, and His mercy endureth forever." Then the Ark having arrived at the gates of the Temple, only the priests who carried it entered in, and they brought it to the Holy of Holies, and the cherubim shaded it with their wings. And the majesty of God in the form of a cloud⁷ filled the Temple, so that the priest could not stand to minister, because of the dazzling glory thereof.

Then Solomon, arrayed in his richest robes, fell on his face before the altar of holocausts, and stretching out his hands, he said: "Lord God of Israel, there is no God like Thee in heaven or on earth. If heaven, and the heaven of heavens⁸ cannot contain Thee, how much less this house which I have built! O Lord my God, hear the hymn and



the prayer which Thy servant prayeth before Thee this day, that Thy eyes may be open upon this house night and day, that Thou mayest hearken to the prayer which Thy servant prayeth in this place to Thee. Mayest Thou hearken to Thy people when they pray in this place. Mayest Thou hear them and show them mercy."

Solomon's prayer being ended, fire fell from heaven and consumed the holocaust⁹. Seeing this, the Israelites fell prostrate on the ground and adored the great God of heaven, Who wrought such wonders before them, and they went away praising His awful name. The Lord appeared a second time¹⁰ to Solomon and said: "I have heard thy prayer, and I have sanctified this house¹¹ which thou hast built; and My eyes and My heart shall be always there."

With all its grandeur and magnificence, Solomon's Temple was but a faint image of our temples, in which Jesus Christ, true God and true Man, dwells under the appearance of bread, pouring out upon us His most abundant graces.

⁶ The princes, ancients, and representatives of the tribes. — ⁷ in which the glory of the Lord was present (Chapt. XXXVIII). — ⁸ heaven in its widest sense. — ⁹ This was a sign that God was well-pleased with the sacrifices and the prayer. — ¹⁰ for an account of the first time God appeared to Solomon see Chapter LVIII. — ¹¹ by My presence.

II. Commentary.

See also Commentary Chapter XXXVIII.

God is infinitely Great, and is not subject to the limits of space or time, for both were created by Him. He is present everywhere in heaven and on earth, but neither heaven nor earth can contain Him who is infinite and immeasurable.

God is Good and Merciful. The Levites sang: "Praise the Lord for He is good and His mercy endureth forever." The story we have just read shows forth His goodness. He came in the cloud, and took possession of the Temple, to dwell there in an especial manner. He was pleased with Solomon's prayer and sacrifice. He appeared to Solomon and promised Him that the Temple should be a holy place, and that He would hearken to those who prayed therein.

Exterior worship. Our worship of God must have an outward expression; for everything which moves our hearts (as, for instance, anger), shows itself outwardly. The Israelites expressed their worship of God by solemn processions, by canticles, by praying aloud, by genuflections, by uplifting of the hands and by sacrifices. And God was pleased with these outward expressions of worship, because they came from the heart.

The necessity of places of worship. God needs no house, nor church; but *we* must have places where we can worship Him in common, and praise Him and ask for blessings; so that it is on our account that God requires places of worship. For this cause He Himself designed the Tabernacle, and, later on, the Temple. The Israelites could worship God everywhere; but in the Temple He was present in an especial manner, to listen to prayers and grant graces, and they were therefore commanded to visit the Temple. By the second Commandment of the Church, visiting churches is imposed on us as a duty.

The Sanctity of Catholic churches. The Israelites had only one Temple: we have many churches. Although the Temple at Jerusalem was exceptionally beautiful and costly, the poorest Catholic chapel is far more holy and rich than it, because in our churches the holy Sacraments are dispensed, and because, above all other reasons, our Lord Jesus Christ, with His Divinity and Humanity, is there present, and, in the Mass, offers Himself for us to His Heavenly Father. As St. Chrysostom beautifully says: "If we could open the heaven of heavens, we should find nothing greater or more holy than that which reposes on our altars." We ought to have the utmost veneration for our churches, and visit them diligently and devoutly. King Solomon threw himself on his knees in the outer court of the Temple, and raised his arms to God in prayer; and shall we be ashamed to kneel down before the Blessed Sacrament and devoutly clasp our hands?

The Consecration of churches. Our churches are solemnly consecrated. Thereby they are sanctified to be the property and dwelling-place of God, and the abode of grace. In memory of its consecration or dedication, and as a thanksgiving for the benefits it has brought to us, it is usual to keep every year the feast of the dedication of a church. On that anniversary we have more cause than had the Israelites to say: "Praise the Lord, for He is good, and His mercy endureth forever."

The Presence of Jesus Christ in the Blessed Sacrament. God was present to the Israelites in a visible way in the Temple; and, therefore, the Temple was in very deed "a dwelling-place of God among men". Now, after God had become Man, would He have removed Himself further from us than He was from the Israelites? Are we to have no dwelling-place of God in our midst? Is nothing to be left to us Christians but the bare memory of God made Man? No! It would be inconceivable that God, after His Incarnation, should be less approachable than He was before it! Jesus Christ would not leave us orphans; therefore, He has remained with us, being present on our altars under the visible appearances of bread and wine in the Blessed Sacrament. There He is in the Tabernacle; His Eyes and His Heart beholding those who came to adore Him. If Jesus were not present in the Most Holy Sacrament, then those who lived under the Old Testament, would have been better off than we who are living under the New Testament, and we should, perforce, envy the Israelites with whom God was present in at least one Temple.

III. Application.

See also Application Chapter XXXVIII.

Visit your Divine Saviour present in the church. Visit Him this very day. Pray to Him with devotion and faith, and thank Him for the love which makes Him dwell with us, offer Himself up for us, and give Himself to us that He may be the food of our souls.

CHAPTER LX.

SOLOMON'S MAGNIFICENCE.—HIS SAD END.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

BESIDES the Temple which he erected to the Lord, Solomon built for himself a palace of wonderful magnificence¹. His throne was of ivory, overlaid with the finest gold. It had six steps, and at the two ends of each step there stood a lion: six to the right and six to the left—in all, twelve lions. But the top of the throne was round, and had a large lion, well made, on either side. And Solomon made two hundred shields of the purest gold, and hung them in his palace.

All the vessels out of which the king drank, were of gold, and all the furniture of his house was likewise of gold. In the days of Solomon there was no silver; no account was made of it, because the royal fleet brought from foreign countries² riches of all kinds, and precious metals in abundance. Solomon built several new cities; he beautified and strengthened Jerusalem, so that, with few exceptions, it surpassed all the cities of that time in beauty and splendour.

And Solomon reigned from the Euphrates to the confines of Egypt, and he was at peace with his neighbours on every side, and each man rested without fear under his own vine and fig-tree. Kings from far and near showed Solomon respect³, and sent him presents. The queen of Saba⁴ came herself from her far distant land to behold his magnificence and hear the words of his wisdom. When she had seen and heard, her spirit failed, and she said to the king: "The report is true⁵ which I heard in my own country, but I would not

believe. Blessed are thy servants who stand before thee and hear thy wisdom." Thus did Solomon exceed all the kings of the earth in riches and in wisdom ⁶.

¹ Or castle. — ² especially from India and Spain. — ³ and desired to see him. — ⁴ in Arabia. — ⁵ what is said about you. — ⁶ Solomon's wisdom is shown forth in his written books, namely the Book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes or the Preacher, and the Canticle of Canticles. These were written under the inspiration of the Holy Ghost and form part of the Canon of Holy Scripture. The first of the three contains wise sayings and rules of life; the second preaches the vanity of all earthly things; and the third sings of the love of God.

But glorious as was the beginning of Solomon's reign, his end was deplorable. Solomon was far advanced in life when his heart was corrupted by strange women; and that king, hitherto so wise, became so blind and depraved that, in order to please these women, he offered incense to false gods, and built temples to them ⁷.

The Lord, being angry, said to Solomon: "Because thou hast done this, and hast not kept My covenant and My precepts, which I have commanded thee, I will divide and rend thy kingdom. Nevertheless, in thy days I will not do it for David, thy father's, sake; neither will I take away the whole kingdom ⁸, but I will give one tribe to thy son, for the sake of David, my servant, and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen."

Then secret revolt and sedition arose among the people, because Solomon, blinded as he was, had overtaxed and oppressed the people, to build palaces for the heathen women who had turned him away from God. Things were in this unhappy state ⁹ when Solomon died, having reigned forty years; and he who had been a great and powerful king, while he walked in the ways of David, his father, died without honour, and, perhaps without repentance. The sad end of Solomon teaches us that as long as we live we are liable to fall into sin, and that hence we should never lose sight of the fear of God, nor neglect to pray for perseverance. Solomon in his prosperity is a faint figure of Christ reigning gloriously in heaven.

⁷ Instead of converting his wives to the true faith he built pagan temples for them, and even enforced the worship of idols. — ⁸ I will give a part to your subject, your servant. — ⁹ His kingdom was crumbling to pieces, for the other tribes of Israel were jealous of Juda; and, moreover, several subjected nations were in a state of rebellion.

II. Commentary.

The First Commandment: Sins against faith. It causes real pain to read that a man so gifted with grace as Solomon could have fallen so low. Look back and think what he was at the dedication of the Temple, and how he cast himself on his knees and prayed so beautifully to the ever present God; and then think of his becoming indifferent about the worship of the true God, of his building temples to the false gods of his wives, and of his tolerating idolatry! It is impossible for us to conceive that Solomon ever believed in and worshipped idols himself; but it is certain that, for the sake of his heathen wives, and against his own convictions, he sanctioned idolatry and even enforced it! By so doing he denied his faith and offended his people. Thus he sinned both by being indifferent about the true faith and by denying it. •

Worldliness and pride lead to religious indifference. But how was it possible that the wise and devout Solomon could offend God so grievously? He gave himself over to worldliness, led a sensual, luxurious life, and set his affections on the earthly riches with which God had endowed him. His love for God grew cold, his zeal for prayer and the service of God grew weak, and he became lax and indifferent about religion. Intercourse and friendship with the pagan kings of Tyre and Sidon and his own pagan wives increased his religious indifference; and, besides this, the universal admiration of which he was the object made him proud, so that he became less and less worthy of divine grace. He lost the grace necessary for perseverance in good, and sank so low that he denied the true faith and upheld idolatry!

Happiness and riches are dangerous. Trials are wholesome. Solomon's sad fall shows us how difficult it is to fear God and persevere in good, in the midst of happiness, riches,

honours and pleasures. Those with whom everything goes well love the world and earthly possessions, forget the end for which they were made, cease to love God, and often lose belief in Him and His revelation. This is why God, in His merciful wisdom, sends us sufferings, so as to prevent our being arrogant and forgetful of God and His holy Commandments. These sufferings sent are real benefits to us, and are a proof of the love which God has for our immortal souls, and of the desire He has to draw us to heaven. "Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth" (Hebr. 12, 6).

Solomon, the thirteenth type of Jesus Christ. Solomon was also a type of Jesus Christ, but in a different way from the preceding ones. While for instance, Abel, Noe, Isaac, Joseph, Job, Moses and David were typical of the suffering Redeemer, in Solomon we find a type of the glorified Redeemer. His very name, signifying peace, presents him to us as a type of Him who is the true Prince of Peace. By his wonderful wisdom, Solomon was a faint type of Him "in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Col. 2, 3). Likewise, the riches of Solomon point to the immeasurable riches of grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. Solomon built the Temple of strong and well-hewn stones: Jesus Christ founded the spiritual temple, the Church, on the rock of Peter and on the Apostles, making it one united whole. The queen of Saba came to Solomon, to testify her reverence for him, and load him with presents: to our Lord came the three Magi from the East to adore Him, and offer Him costly gifts. Solomon, seated in majesty on his lofty and magnificent throne, ruled over many nations. Jesus Christ, raised on the throne of heaven, and sitting at the right hand of God the Father; rules with divine majesty over all the nations of the earth, and over the whole host of heaven.

The conversion of Solomon. Most of the Fathers of the Church are of opinion that, when troubles overtook him towards the close of his life, Solomon was converted and did penance, and thus was not eternally lost.

True happiness. Towards the end of his life Solomon wrote these words in the Book of Ecclesiastes: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. I made me great works, I built me houses, and planted vineyards

I made gardens and orchards and set them with trees of all kinds. I heaped together for myself silver and gold. I made me singing men and singing women. I surpassed in riches all that were before me in Jerusalem; my wisdom also remained with me. Whatsoever my eyes desired, I refused them not; and I withheld not my heart from enjoying every pleasure. I saw in all things vanity and vexation of mind. Fear God and keep His Commandments, for this is all man." By these words he meant to say: "All earthly possessions and joys are passing and cannot make a man really happy. Only the fear and love of God can bring happiness on earth and joy in eternity." We should not, therefore, set our hearts on the good things of this earth, but should strive with all our hearts after those which are eternal.

Means of perseverance. He who desires to avoid grievous sin and to persevere to the end in what is right must, firstly, refrain from pleasure-seeking and laxity; secondly, he must avoid all intercourse with bad companions; thirdly, he must be humble and pray to God for the grace of final perseverance, for this most important of all graces can only be obtained by prayer.

III. Application.

Solomon served God for many years and received the gift of wisdom from Him; and yet how deeply he fell!

Do you desire to stand fast in what is right? Then mistrust yourself, and be watchful. "Watch and pray that you enter not into temptation." Pray often for the grace of perseverance.

THIRD EPOCH.

DECLINE OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL. FROM THE TIME OF ROBOAM TO JESUS CHRIST (962 B. C.).

CHAPTER LXI.

DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

AFTER the death of Solomon, all the people ¹ of Israel came to Roboam, his son, and said: "Thy father laid a grievous yoke ² upon us, do thou take off a little of his most heavy yoke, and we will serve thee." Roboam told them to come back on the third day, and he would give them his answer. He then took counsel with the ancients of the people who had stood before Solomon, his father, as to what course he should pursue.

The ancients advised the king, saying: "If thou wilt yield to this people and speak gentle words to them, they will be thy servants always." ³ Roboam, not satisfied with this advice of the old men, betook himself to the young men who were his own companions, and asked what they would counsel him to do.

The young men who had been brought up with him, said: "Thus shalt thou speak to this people: My father put a heavy yoke upon you, but I will add to your yoke; my father beat you with whips, but I will beat you with scorpions." ⁴ When the people had returned on the third day for an answer, Roboam spoke to them as the young men had advised. Then the people, seeing that they had nothing

to expect from their new king, began to say among themselves that Roboam was nothing to them.

¹ The representatives of all Israel. They had assembled themselves at Sichem, where Roboam went to receive their homage. — ² heavy taxes. — ³ They will obey you as loyal subjects. — ⁴ The scourges generally used were made of leather, but, sometimes, to inflict a more severe punishment, thorns and spikes were twisted in with the leather, and such spiked scourges were known by the name of scorpions. Roboam wished to say: "I will be even harder to you than my father was." The arrogant young king wished to bend and intimidate his subjects by this senseless threat.

And ten of the tribes, throwing off his authority, chose for their king, Jeroboam, who had been a servant⁵ of Solomon. Only the two tribes of Juda and Benjamin remained with Roboam. From that day forth the people of Israel were divided into two kingdoms, that of Juda⁶ and that of Israel⁷.

Jerusalem continued to be the capital of Juda, and Samaria became afterwards the capital of Israel. But the effects of the separations went still further; for Jeroboam, king of Israel, thought within himself, that if the people continued to go up to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice to the Lord in His Temple, their hearts would turn again to Roboam, and the kingdom of Israel would surely return to the house of David.

To avoid this danger he made two golden calves, which he placed at the two extremities of his kingdom, one at Dan⁸, and the other at Bethel⁹, and told the people that they should not go up to Jerusalem to worship, for that these were the gods which had brought them out of Egypt. In this way he led the people into idolatry¹⁰, for they repaired to the places pointed out to them by their king, and worshipped the golden calves.

On the other hand, Roboam, king of Juda, who had seen with grief the defection of the ten tribes, was all his life making war on Jeroboam. This state of continued warfare was kept up by their successors on both sides, and more than once the aid of foreign nations was called in by one or the other. In this way did these wicked kings cause much sin and misery among their people.

Even the kings of Juda soon fell into idolatry, and the people, following their example, forgot the worship of the true God, and gave themselves up to all manner of wickedness. All this sin, ruin and misery were partly the effects of Solomon's departure from the ways of justice: terrible example of the ruin that sin brings on those who commit it, and even on their children after them.

⁵ He had been appointed by Solomon to be tax-gatherer of the tribe of Ephraim. — ⁶ To these two tribes the Levites joined themselves, as also many members of the other tribes who adhered to the worship of the true God at Jerusalem. The two kingdoms were about equal in strength, for Juda (to which was attached the tribe of Benjamin) was the most numerous and powerful of all the tribes; though as far as extent of territory went, the northern kingdom, Israel, was superior to the southern, or kingdom of Juda. — ⁷ The whole united kingdom had hitherto been known by the name of Israel, but from henceforward only the ten tribes are to be understood by the name. — ⁸ See map, east of Tyre. — ⁹ See map, north of Jerusalem. — ¹⁰ He acted thus from a false policy, for he said to himself: If the people go to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice in the Temple, and thus maintain a spiritual union with Juda, they will, before long, be wishing for a national union, and separate themselves from me.

The kingdom of Israel lasted for 253 years (from 975 to 722 B. C.), and during that time it had nineteen kings, belonging to ten different families, who all did evil in the sight of God.

The kingdom of Juda lasted 387 years, till the year 588 B. C. It had twenty kings, all of the family of David, of whom the greater number were wicked.

II. Commentary.

The Faithfulness of God. See how the punishment which, as you learnt in Chapt. LX, was threatened, was now brought to pass! Roboam's arrogance led to the accomplishment of God's designs, by alienating the ten tribes. It was not that God *willed* the sin, but that He *permitted* it, in order that Solomon's faithlessness should be punished as He had said.

Arrogance and flattery. Roboam's conduct towards his subjects was very unwise, for it was his harsh answer to their appeal which drove them into rebellion. How could Roboam, the son of the wise Solomon, commit such a folly? He spoke and acted thus foolishly, firstly, because he was blinded by

pride; secondly, because he would not take the advice of the wise, but followed, instead, that of his young companions, who took care to flatter his pride. You can see by this how blind passion makes a man, and how disastrous it is to listen to the voice of unscrupulous flatterers. "He that walketh with the wise, shall be wise: a friend of fools shall become like them" (Prov. 13, 20).

Gentleness. If Roboam had returned a soft, friendly answer to the people, he would have conciliated them and all the twelve tribes would have acknowledged him as king. "A mild answer breaketh wrath: but a harsh word stirreth up fury" (Prov. 15, 1). "Blessed are the meek."

Rebellion. The ten tribes sinned by rebelling; and their sin was all the greater, because their defection from the house of David implied a defection from the future Messias, and a renunciation of the promises of God.

Partaking in the guilt of others. His young advisers shared in the guilt of Roboam's sin, and in its evil consequences, by urging him to a hard and cruel course of action. Jeroboam committed a terrible sin when he incited the people to idolatry, and induced them to apostatize from the true God. God punished him by the overthrow of his whole family. Jeroboam's son, Nadab, only reigned two years. Then a rebellion against him broke out, and the whole house of Jeroboam was destroyed.

III. Application.

Are you fond of being with giddy companions? Do you follow their advice in preference to the injunctions and exhortations of your parents and superiors? Do you listen to the voice of your passions rather than to that of your conscience? Roboam lost the largest part of his kingdom, because he listened to the unprincipled advice of flatterers. So, if you like the company of those who are unprincipled, you will lose both faith and innocence, which are more valuable than a whole kingdom. Therefore avoid bad companions.

DECLINE OF THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL.

CHAPTER LXII.

GOD RAISES UP PROPHETS.—MISSION OF THE PROPHET ELIAS.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

IN order to bring back the kings and the people to better sentiments, God raised up, at different times, holy persons who are known as prophets¹. These prophets preached penance in a very impressive manner, and they proved the truth of their divine mission by working great miracles.

God revealed to them many future events. They predicted the principal circumstances of the birth, life, passion, death and glory of the Messias. One of the most celebrated of the prophets was Elias. He lived in the reign of Achab, king of Israel. This king was very wicked. None of his predecessors had committed so many crimes as he.

He had married a gentile woman named Jezabel; and he had built a temple to Baal, and had consecrated to the service of that false god four hundred and fifty priests², whilst he had caused the priests of the Lord to be put to death. In a word, his intention seemed to be to destroy the true religion entirely among the ten tribes.

Elias, clad in a rough sheep's skin, and with a staff in his hand, presented himself before Achab and said: "As the Lord liveth, the God of Israel, in whose sight I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these three years, but according to the words of my mouth." Achab was very angry to hear these words of the prophet, and secretly resolved to put Elias to death.

Then the Lord, knowing the evil intention of the king, commanded Elias to go and conceal himself near the brook Carith³, in the vicinity of the Jordan. The prophet obeyed, and behold, the ravens brought him bread or flesh⁴ every morning and every evening for many days; and he drank of the torrent.

¹ They led a life of penance, wore coarse clothing, prayed and fasted. They were sent by God to maintain the true faith and the observance of His Commandments, and to bring back the people to Him. They announced the judgments which would fall on king and people if they were not converted, and they pointed onwards to the hope of Israel, the Redeemer, foretelling many things about Him. It was on account of these prophecies that they were called prophets. —

² Achab reigned from 923 to 902 B. C. Jezabel was daughter to the king of Sidon. At her request Achab built in Samaria a temple to the sun-god Baal; and, besides the worship of calves, introduced the horrible worship of Baal and of Moloch, to whom children were offered up in sacrifice. Added to this he killed the priests of God. Thus, there was every fear that the true faith would be entirely eradicated. For this cause God raised up the prophet Elias, that through him the true faith might be preserved in Israel. — ³ This brook flows into the Jordan from the east, through a country full of forests and caverns. Here Elias could easily hide himself, even if the king searched the whole country through for him. — ⁴ From whence did they get this food? The Lord Who commanded them to bring it provided for that (St. Augustine).

Some time after, the brook ran dry ⁵, and the Lord commanded Elias to go to Sarepta ⁶, a city of Sidon. Elias went accordingly, and when he drew near the gate of the city, he saw a woman gathering sticks ⁷, and he called her and said: "Give me a little water in a vessel that I may drink."

As the woman was going to fetch it he called after her: "Bring me also a morsel of bread." She answered: "As the Lord thy God ⁸ liveth, I have no bread, but only a handful of meal in a pot, and a little oil in a cruse; I am gathering two sticks that I may go and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it and die." ⁹

The prophet assured her, saying: "Fear not, but go and do as thou hast said; but first make for me of the same meal a little hearth-cake. For thus saith the Lord: 'The pot of meal shall not waste, nor the cruse of oil be diminished until the day wherein the Lord will give rain upon the earth.'" ¹⁰

The woman did as Elias had told her, and from that day forth she had meal in her pot, and oil in her cruse, and knew no want, neither Elias, nor she, nor her son. Now, it happened some time after, that the son of this poor woman of

Sarepta fell sick and died. She said to the prophet: "What have I done to thee, thou man of God? Hast thou come to me that my iniquities should be remembered?" Thereupon Elias took the child, and went into the upper chamber, and laid it upon his own bed. Then he cried ¹¹ to the Lord: "O Lord,



hast Thou also afflicted the widow with whom I am after a sort maintained?" Then he stretched himself and measured himself three times upon the child; and the soul of the boy returned and he revived.

Elias took the child and brought him down to his mother, and said: "Behold, thy son liveth." Full of joy and gratitude, the

woman exclaimed: "Now by this I know that thou art a man of God, and the word of the Lord in thy mouth is true." ¹²

Elias, the grown man, stretching himself and measuring himself upon the small body of the dead child, is a figure of the Incarnation, in which the Son of God so adapted Himself to our human nature as to become Man without ceasing to be God.

⁵ Because no rain had fallen for a long time. — ⁶ See map: between Tyre and Sidon. — ⁷ because she was poor. — ⁸ She recognised Elias to be an Israelite, and swore by the living God; for she believed in Him, though she was living in the midst of the pagan Sidonians. — ⁹ of hunger. — ¹⁰ By acting thus Elias put the faith and charity of the widow to a very severe test. — ¹¹ or prayed instantly. — ¹² that you are a prophet of God, and that He has revealed His will to you, proclaiming it through your mouth.

II. Commentary.

The Mercy of God. Of His mercy He did not entirely reject the faithless Israelites, but sent His prophets to them from time to time to give them a chance of repentance and pardon.

The Omniscience of God. The prophets were inspired by God, or else they would not have been able to foretell the future. The future is known only to God, with Whom times and seasons are as nothing.

The Omnipresence of God. "As the Lord liveth in whose sight I stand," said Elias to Achab. Wherever we are or go, God is with us. Elias lived in the constant recollection of God's presence, and this it was that gave him courage and consolation under persecution, and when in danger of death. He did not feel himself deserted even in the cave of Carith, because God was with him.

The Omnipotence of God. Winds and clouds, dew and rain obey him, and by His command a terrible drought pervaded Israel for three years and a half. The unreasoning ravens did His will, and twice each day brought food to the prophet of God. "The most ravenous of birds," says St. Basil, "were compelled to supply the prophet with food; and they, whose nature it was to seize the food of others, waited on the man of God. Completely forgetful of their nature, they obeyed the divine behest." It was by God's almighty will that the meal in the widow's pot and the oil in her cruse remained undiminished. And He who is Lord of life and death called the widow's son back to life, commanding his soul to return to his dead body.

The Goodness of God. God lovingly provided for the safety of His persecuted servant, hid him from Achab's bloodthirsty emissaries, and fed him by a continuous miracle in the desert. He protected him on his perilous journey to Sarepta, increased the meal and oil, by a miracle, for the sustenance of himself and the widow, and called the poor woman's dead son back to life.

Justice and Mercy. The long drought which was sent by God at the prayer of Elias (James 5, 17 &c.), was a miracle both of divine justice and of divine mercy. On the one hand, it most justly punished the idolatrous king and people; on the other hand, it proved to the Israelites that the fruits of the earth did not come from Baal, but from God, Who is the Lord of heaven and earth. The famine was sent to them as a means of inducing them to return to the true faith.

Confidence in God. Elias showed admirable courage by fearlessly announcing the impending judgment. The prophet drew his courage from his great confidence in God, giving himself over entirely to His gracious guidance. When the brook dried up he gave way neither to fear nor lamentation. He did not say: "Now I must die of thirst," but, on the contrary, he said to himself: "God will help me." When he was sent to the poor widow of Sarepta, a town in the kingdom of Sidon, he might naturally have thought: "Why am I to go among Jezabel's people? Are they not sure to kill me? And why am I to go to a poor widow? How can she support me? Why should I not seek hospitality of some rich person?" But the holy man of God gave ear to no such doubts, and obeyed God's commands with simplicity and confidence. It is in this way that we ought always to trust in God.

Faith. Achab and his people would not believe Elias when he foretold the coming drought. On the other hand, the gentile did believe the promise which he made to her in God's name. To find faith the prophet of God had to go into a heathen country. It was hard for the widow, herself dying of hunger, to be told to divide her last morsel of food with the prophet; but she did so, because she believed, and obeyed a secret inspiration of God; and God rewarded her faith and charity by miraculously increasing her meal and oil, by restoring her dead son to life, and by confirming her in the true faith. Works of mercy draw down on us the grace of God.

The power of prayer. At Elias's prayer the heavens were shut, so that no rain fell for a long time. By prayer he raised the dead boy to life. At the brook Carith he spent his days in prayer and contemplation. His prayer was efficacious, firstly, because he prayed with devotion, humility and confidence; and, secondly, because he was a just man, lived in the grace of God, and avoided sin.

The soul is the life of the body (Chapt. III). As soon as the soul is separated from the body the latter dies; and if the dead body is to be restored to life, the soul must return

to it. It was thus therefore that Elias prayed: "Let the soul &c."

The raising of the widow's son by Elias is, according to St. Augustine, a type of the spiritual resurrection of the sinful world through Christ. The world lay dead in sin; but Jesus Christ has raised it up by His intercession and His Death on the cross.

As Elias stretched himself three times on the body of the boy, breathing on his face; so, when administering holy Baptism, the priest bows himself three times over the person to be baptized, and breathes upon him, as a sign that by sanctifying grace the soul is raised to a supernatural state of life.

III. Application.

Do you pray willingly and devoutly? He who wishes to pray well must accustom himself to pray diligently. Each time you pray, place yourself in the presence of God and say: "Lord, help me to pray."

Could you not sometimes give an alms, or do some service of love to your fellow men; either to your comrades, or to some sick or poor person? Make a resolution to do something of the sort to-day.

CHAPTER LXIII.

THE SACRIFICE OF ELIAS.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

AFTER the earth had remained three years and six months without rain or dew¹, the Lord spoke to Elias: "Go and show thyself to Achab, that I may give rain upon the face of the earth." The prophet obeyed. When Achab saw him, he said: "Art thou he that troublest Israel?" The prophet answered: "I have not troubled Israel, but thou and thy father's house, who have forsaken the Commandments of the Lord and followed Baalim. Nevertheless, send now and gather unto me all Israel unto Mount Carmel², and the prophets of Baal, four hundred and fifty, and the prophets of the groves, four hundred."

Achab obeyed, being afraid to do otherwise, on account of the famine that was everywhere, and he went himself to the mountain³. Then Elias spoke to the people of Israel, saying:

"How long do you halt between two sides⁴. If the Lord be God⁵, follow Him; but is Baal, then follow him."

The people, feeling the justice of his reproach, made no answer⁶. They were ashamed and afraid. Elias then added: "I only remain a prophet of the Lord, but the prophets of Baal are four hundred and fifty men. Let two bullocks be given us; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, but put no fire under; and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under it. Call ye on the names of your gods, and I will call on the name of my Lord; and the God that shall answer by fire, let him be the God." All the people answered: "A very good proposal".

¹ During these three years and a half nothing could grow, so that both men and beasts were in a state of great want. Many died, for the necessaries of life, brought in from other countries, cost a great deal. In the third year of the famine Achab said to the governor of his house: "Go into the land unto all fountains of water, and into all valleys, to see if we can find grass and save the horses and mules, that the beasts may not utterly perish" (3 Kings 18, 5). By this we can see how great the want was. Trees were withered, meadows burnt up, gardens and fields bare. Nothing green was to be seen, and the parched earth cried out for the life-giving rain. —

² Mount Carmel is situated to the north of Samaria, projecting into the Mediterranean, where it terminates in Cape Carmel (see map). The sacrifice of Elias took place on one of the heights of the chain. There stands, not far from the sea, a famous Carmelite Monastery.

³ He accepted the man of God's proposal, being forced thereto by the need of his subjects. — ⁴ i. e. why do you waver to and fro between God and Baal. They wished to serve two masters, God and Baal; and for this reason Elias bade them come to a decision. —

⁵ Jehovah, Whom your fathers worshipped. — ⁶ because, on the one hand, they could not excuse themselves, and, on the other, they did not wish to sever themselves from the worship of Baal, and the pleasures accompanying it.

Then the priests of Baal, clad in their richest garments and crowned with laurel, took an ox and slew him. They erected an altar, placed the dead ox upon it, and danced around it crying out: "Baal, hear us." This they did from morning until noon, but no fire came to consume their sacrifice. Then Elias, mocking them, called out: "Cry with a

louder voice; for he is a god, and perhaps he is talking with some one, or on a journey, or he is asleep and must be awaked."

Then they began to cry louder than ever⁷, hacking their bodies with knives⁸, as they were accustomed to do, until they were covered with blood. This they kept up till evening, but all in vain⁹. Then Elias told the people to come to him. And he erected an altar to the Lord; took twelve stones¹⁰, and laid the wood in order upon them, then placed the ox which had been cut in pieces, on the wood.

He then poured water upon the victim till it ran down on every side and filled the trench around the altar¹¹. This being done, he said: "O Lord God, show this day that Thou art the God of Israel, and I Thy servant, and that according to Thy commandment I have done all these things. Hear me, O Lord, hear me; that this Thy people may learn that Thou art the Lord God, and that Thou hast turned their hearts again."¹²

That instant fire came down from heaven and consumed the holocaust, the wood, the stones, and the water in the trench. The people, having witnessed this prodigy, fell on their faces¹³, exclaiming: "The Lord He is God! The Lord He is God!" And the prophet, retiring from the multitude, went up alone to the top of the mountain where he prostrated himself before the Lord in praise and thanksgiving.

Then he besought the Lord to refresh the earth with water. And behold, a little cloud arose from the sea, no bigger than the foot of a man, and it spread itself gradually over the heavens, and rain fell in abundance. The land of Israel, suffering from the long drought, was a figure of the great spiritual drought from which the whole world suffered before the coming of Christ. Elias bidding the heavens to rain was a figure of Christ opening the fountains of grace to a perishing world. The rain itself which gave a new life to the earth, is a type of the grace of God which renews the soul of the converted sinner.

⁷ They did not notice the scorn contained in the words of Elias, for they really believed that their god slept and travelled like a



man. — ⁸ They cut themselves till the blood flowed, in the hope that this would persuade Baal to listen to them. — ⁹ Why? Because Baal was the creation of their fancy. The absurdity of idolatry was now made manifest. — ¹⁰ Why twelve? Because they represented the twelve tribes of which the chosen people consisted. — ¹¹ He did this to prove that the fire was due to no natural causes. — ¹² Think how anxiously the king, the false priests, and the people must have watched to see what would be the result of Elias's prayer. All in a moment a fire fell from heaven which consumed the very stones! It fell from a cloudless sky, for not even the smallest cloud was to be seen, as we know by the conclusion of the story. — ¹³ They had been convinced of the impotence of Baal and of the omnipotence of God. Therefore, they fell on their faces and worshipped the Almighty.

II. Commentary.

The object of miracles. The extraordinary drought, lasting for three years and a half, was the effect of God's interrupting by a miracle the law, which He Himself gave to nature. The drought was sent both as a punishment to Achab and the people for their idolatry, and as a means of their conversion. The silence, however, of the people, when Elias demanded of them a confession of faith, shows that pagan opinions were

still dominant among them. The priests of the true God had been killed, so that there was no one to teach the truth to the poor people; and the priests of Baal, whom the king upheld, taught them that the famine had been sent by Baal as a punishment for their lack of stanchness in the pagan belief. But God, in His mercy, worked new and startling miracles to convince the deluded people of the folly of idolatry, and to help them to return to the true faith. It was in the presence of them all that He rained down this wonderful fire from a cloudless sky, which consumed even the wet stones of the altar. As soon as the people, overwhelmed by the stupendous miracle, fell on their faces and adored Him, confessing aloud their faith in Him, He sent the wished for rain, so that all men might know that the drought had come from Him, and that from Him came now help and salvation. But it was also for our benefit and instruction that this great miracle was wrought, in order that none of us may waver in our faith in the merciful, just and almighty God. It teaches us that God is the Lord of all the universe, that all the powers of nature, rain and drought, dews and clouds, obey Him. We may sow and plant, but the increase comes from God.

Firm faith. Like a very rock of faith and confidence, Elias confronted the wavering multitude, the unbelieving king and the frantic idolatrous priests. He reproached the people for their indecision; he mocked the insane superstitions and vain efforts of the priests of Baal, and never doubted for one instant that God would hear his prayer and confound his enemies.

Fortitude. Achab hated Elias, and his hatred was increased by the long drought which he attributed to the prophet. Elias knew of the hatred borne him by the king; nevertheless, at the Lord's bidding, he fearlessly confronted him. He showed equal fortitude when he challenged the priests of Baal in the face of all the people. If God had not heard his prayer and sent fire from heaven, he would most certainly have been killed; but his ardent faith and zeal for God's glory induced him to risk his life in the hope of bringing back the people from their sad defection.

The power of prayer. It was at the prayer of Elias that God worked the wonderful miracle which has been described. For this reason St. James cites the prayer of Elias as an example to urge us to have great confidence in prayer. He says (5, 16, 18): "The continual prayer of a just man availeth much. Elias was a man passable like unto us: and with prayer he prayed that it might not rain upon the earth, and it rained not for three years and six months. And he prayed again: and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit."

Half-heartedness and indecision. The reproach made by Elias to the people for their wavering and indecision applies equally to many Christians, who hesitate between virtue and vice, the spirit of Christ and the spirit of the world, the service of God and the service of the devil, although in holy Baptism they renounced Satan and all his works, and promised to be faithful to God. Our Lord warns us thus: "No man can serve two masters (who give opposite commands); for either he will hate the one, and love the other: or he will sustain the one, and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon (i. e. the riches &c. &c. of this world)." (Mat. 6, 24).

The want of priests. The people of the kingdom of Israel sank deeper and deeper into idolatry and crime, because the priests who taught them the true religion, and the practice of it, were killed. It is a great misfortune for Christian countries when there is a lack of good priests; for in that case faith grows weak, morals become lax, and many souls are lost (New Test. XXXII).

III. Application.

Do you halt between two sides? Do you hesitate between good and evil, between the commands of God and the promptings of your own evil passions? To-day, perhaps, you have promised to serve God, and to-morrow you will follow some evil desire. This wavering between good and evil is a dangerous game for the salvation of your soul, for you are really wavering between heaven and hell. Away, then, with indecision! Love God with your whole heart and be true to Him till death. Renew this day your baptismal vows.

CHAPTER LXIV.

WICKEDNESS OF ACHAB AND JEZABEL—
THEIR PUNISHMENT.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

ACHAB had a palace at Jezrahel¹, and near it was a vineyard owned by a man named Naboth. Achab, coveting the vineyard, said one day to Naboth: "Give me thy vineyard, that I may make me a garden, and I will give thee a better vineyard, or I will give thee the worth of it in money." Naboth answered him: "The Lord be merciful to me, and not let me give thee the inheritance of my fathers."² For the law of Moses forbade the son to sell the property which he had inherited from his forefathers.

The king was so troubled, because he could not have the vineyard that he could neither eat nor sleep³. Jezabel, his queen, perceiving this, inquired the cause of his sadness and fretting. The king, having explained the cause, Jezabel mockingly said: "Thou art of great authority, indeed, and governest well the kingdom of Israel! Arise and eat bread, and be of good cheer: I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth the Jezrahelite."

She then wrote letters in the king's name to the chief men of the city⁴, whom she knew to be wicked like herself, requesting them to find some men who would wrongfully accuse Naboth. These men⁵ were easily found, and they bore false witness against Naboth, saying that he had blasphemed God and the king. And on their testimony Naboth was condemned, taken out of the city, and stoned to death⁶.

¹ Achab generally lived in Samaria, but he had also a summer-palace at Jezrahel, where Naboth's vineyard was. — ² It was expressly forbidden by the Law to sell a family-heritage; though in cases of necessity it could be mortgaged until the next jubilee-year. It was therefore out of fear of God that Naboth refused to sell his vineyard. —

³ Like a spoilt child who cannot have his own way. — ⁴ The ancients and representatives of the city. — ⁵ Holy Scripture calls these men sons of Belial, or of the devil, because they bore false witness against Naboth, thus causing his death. How great must have been the

corruption of the whole people, if even their chief men, and the witnesses called by them, were so wicked! — ⁶ Death by stoning was the punishment decreed for blasphemy. The wicked Jezabel who did not herself believe in God, caused an innocent man to be put to death on the charge of blasphemy against Him!

Jezabel, being informed of Naboth's death, went and told her husband that he might now take the vineyard, as Naboth was dead. And Achab took the vineyard. Then the Lord commanded Elias to go to Achab, to reproach him with his crime, and to tell him that the dogs would lick up his own blood on the very spot on which Naboth was slain, and that the queen would be devoured by dogs in the same field. This prediction was literally fulfilled.

Three years after, Achab was mortally wounded in a battle⁷, with the Syrians; and when the chariot in which he received the fatal wound was being washed after his death, the dogs came and licked up his blood⁸.

Some time after, when Jehu was king, he went to Jezrahel. And when Jezabel heard of his coming she dressed herself in her richest apparel. She painted her face and adorned her head, and stood at the window of her palace. Jehu, seeing her at the window, ordered her servants to cast her down. They did so, and the walls were sprinkled with her blood, and the hoofs of the horses trod upon her, and the dogs came and ate her flesh⁹. After Jehu had dined he ordered Jezabel to be buried, but only her head, feet and hands remained.

⁷ An arrow, which pierced a joint of his coat of mail, wounded him so seriously that he died soon after. — ⁸ As his bloody corpse was being washed in the pool of Samaria. — ⁹ Jehu had all Achab's children and relatives put to death, so that the whole race of the impious king was destroyed.

II. Commentary.

The Omniscience of God. God knew, and revealed to Elias that Naboth was innocent, and that Achab had seized his vineyard by unjust means.

The Justice of God. Achab and his wicked wife were not able to enjoy for long their unjustly got possession. The measure of their sins was full, and God punished them by

a terrible and unexpected death. Jezabel's body was trampled on by horses, and devoured by dogs in Jezrahel, where she had murdered Naboth; nor was even honourable burial vouchsafed to her. Such was the terrible end of this imperious and arrogant woman! "Treasures of wickedness shall profit nothing" (Prov. 10, 2).

The Faithfulness of God. The punishment with which Almighty God threatened Achab and Jezabel was brought to pass. When Achab went out to fight against the Syrians, he disguised himself so that he might not be recognised as king and attacked. But "a certain man (of the Syrians) bent his bow, shooting at a venture, and chanced to strike the king of Israel between the lungs and the stomach. And the blood ran out of the wound in the midst of the chariot, and he died in the evening. And they washed his chariot in the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked up his blood" (3 Kings 22, 34 &c.). Now, was it by chance that the arrow hit the disguised king; that his blood flowed into the chariot, and that the dogs licked it up? No, all this occurred under the Providence of the just and true God, Who moulded circumstances in order to bring that to pass which He had threatened!

The eighth Commandment. The witnesses against Naboth sinned grievously; for they bore false witness in a court of justice, as to a serious matter that involved life and death. They were rightly called children of the devil, because it requires a devilish malice to commit such a sin.

The tenth Commandment. Achab sinned grievously against this Commandment by coveting the inheritance of Naboth.

The seventh Commandment. He also sinned grievously against this Commandment by taking for himself the property of the murdered man.

Sharing in the guilt of others. The prophet said to Achab: "Thou hast slain &c." But how could Achab be Naboth's murderer? He had not accused him or sentenced him to death! No, but Achab knew perfectly well that his wicked wife would use unlawful means to gain possession of the vineyard, and yet, not only did he utter no word of protest,

but consented to Jezabel's writing a letter in his name, and sealed it with his royal seal! Thus, by his silence, he consented to his wife's wicked project. Neither did Jezabel kill Naboth with her own hands; but she commanded the ancients of the city to have him falsely accused and put to death. In this way she shared in the guilt of others by command, and was guilty of murder.

Unlawful obedience. Ought the ancients of the city to have obeyed or disobeyed the royal command?

Covetousness. The source or root of all these sins we have been hearing about was covetousness. Achab's desire to possess Naboth's vineyard led to anger, bribery, injustice, murder and robbery. Covetousness, or avarice, is therefore one of the capital sins.

Inordinate desires make men unhappy, peevish and ill-tempered. Achab, not being able to gratify his longing for the vineyard, became sad and angry, and his very life was, as it were, darkened. Was that not silly and ridiculous!

III. Application.

Have you ever taken anything that does not belong to you, such as fruit &c.? Are you contented with what you have got? If the desire to have that which is unlawful seizes you, overcome it at once, and think of the just God Who hates and punishes injustice. He who is contented is happy, but he who is discontented lives a life of disquiet, and is in great danger of sin and eternal damnation.

CHAPTER LXV.

ELIAS TAKEN UP TO HEAVEN—THE PROPHET ELISEUS CHOSEN TO SUCCEED HIM.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

AT one time Elias, being persecuted by Jezabel¹, fled into the desert². He was very sad³, and desired to die⁴, for he thought all the Israelites had fallen into idolatry. Being fatigued, he cast himself down and slept in the shadow of a juniper-tree; and behold an angel of the Lord touched him and said: "Arise, eat; for thou hast yet a great way

to go." Elias looked, and saw at his head a hearth cake and a vessel of water. He arose, ate and drank, and walked in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights⁵, until he came to the mount of God⁶, Horeb.

Then the Lord appeared to him amidst the whistling of a gentle wind, consoled him and said: "Return and anoint Eliseus to be prophet in thy room, and I will leave me seven thousand men whose knees have not bowed before Baal."⁷ Elias departed, and found Eliseus⁸ ploughing with oxen. He cast his mantle upon him⁹, and Eliseus forthwith left the oxen and the plough, followed Elias and ministered to him.

¹ Ever since the great miracle on Mount Carmel, Achab had not ventured to persecute the prophet of God; but Jezabel's hatred of him had been intensified by the overthrow of the priests of Baal, and she now did all she could to seize on the prophet, and put him to death. — ² To Bersabee, south of the kingdom of Juda. — ³ Because impiety had gained the upper hand, and the true religion was oppressed and persecuted. — ⁴ So that he might no longer have to behold the triumph of vice and unbelief. — ⁵ He was so strengthened by this food that he was able to travel fasting for forty days and forty nights, as far as Horeb, one of the mountains of Sinai. — ⁶ so called, because God Himself had appeared there to Moses (Chapter XXXI). It was only two hundred miles from Bersabee to Sinai; and if Elias had not made a circuit he might have reached the holy mountain much sooner than he did. Probably he visited on the way some of the places sanctified by the miracles wrought by God during the Israelites' passage through the wilderness. By his pilgrimage to the mountain, consecrated by the giving of the Law, and to other places full of mighty associations, Elias hoped to gain strength, courage and consolation for the further pursuit of his high calling. — ⁷ i. e. "you must not believe that idolatry is universal in Israel. There are several thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal, or who, in other words, have not succumbed to idolatry". — ⁸ in the plain to the south of the Sea of Galilee. Eliseus and his servants were ploughing with twelve yoke of oxen, by which we can see that he was a man of means. — ⁹ as a sign that Eliseus was to be his successor in the prophetic office.

But the time came when the Lord wished to take Elias from the earth. The spirit of God led him to the Jordan¹⁰, and Eliseus accompanied him. Elias took his mantle, folded it together, and struck the waters; the waters divided, and both passed over on dry ground. As they walked on, there



appeared a fiery chariot with horses¹¹. Elias was taken up alive to heaven¹². Eliseus saw him and cried: "My father! my father!" When he saw Elias no longer, he rent his garments in grief; then taking the mantle which Elias had dropped, he went back and struck with it the waters of the Jordan. They were divided, and Eliseus passed over. The other disciples¹³ of Elias, seeing this, said: "The spirit of Elias hath rested upon Eliseus."¹⁴ And coming to meet him, they worshipped him, falling to the ground.

¹⁰ The Spirit of God had revealed to Elias his approaching translation from this earth, and had inspired him to go to the Jordan. —

¹¹ Angels snatched up Elias from the earth by means of a fiery apparition having the semblance of a chariot and horses. — ¹² or, rather, heavenwards. He could not be taken *into* heaven. Like Enoch he was glorified without tasting of death, and was taken to a mysterious abode of peace and consolation. Before our Lord's second coming to judge the world, Elias will come again to this earth to preach penance (Mat. 17, 11). — ¹³ Elias's disciples had stayed on the other side of the Jordan, and from thence had seen his marvellous translation. —

¹⁴ They knew by the testimony of this great miracle, that the gifts of prophecy and working miracles had passed from Elias to Eliseus.

After Elias had been taken up into heaven, Eliseus arose and exhorted the Israelites to remain faithful to the Lord. God also favoured him with the gift of miracles¹⁵. When he came to Jericho, the men of the city said to him: "The situation of this city is very good, but the waters are very bad." Eliseus answered: "Bring me a new vessel, and put salt into it." When they had brought it he went out to the spring¹⁶, cast the salt into it, and the waters were healed.

One day when Eliseus was going up to Bethel where the golden calf was worshipped¹⁷, some boys came out of the city and mocked him, saying: "Go up, thou bald head." Eliseus, knowing that in dishonouring him they dishonoured God, turned back and cursed them in the name of the Lord¹⁸. Immediately two bears came out of the wood that was near by, and killed forty-two of the boys.

¹⁵ God worked a great many miracles through him, in order that the people might believe that God had sent him. — ¹⁶ to the well outside the town from which the water was conducted to the city. This well, like all those in the neighbourhood of the Dead Sea, had a briny taste. Therefore, when Eliseus threw salt into it, it was simply as a type of purity, and not because this ingredient was wanting to it. It was not by the salt itself that the water was turned sweet, but by the power of God, invoked by Eliseus. The spring is still running: it is known by the name of the Sultan's spring, or Eliseus's spring, and its water is very good. — ¹⁷ Who set up the golden calf there (see Chapter LXI)? Bethel was the head centre of idolatry. It is probable that the boys were set on to mock Eliseus by their impious parents, who very likely recognised him by the mantle of Elias. — ¹⁸ He foretold to them as well as to their wicked parents that God would punish them, and immediately God sent the punishment by means of the two bears.

Some time after, Eliseus cured of leprosy, in a miraculous manner, Naaman, general of the Syrian army¹⁹, a rich and valiant man. The wife of Naaman had in her service a young Israelite girl who had been carried off into Syria by robbers. This maiden then said one day to her mistress: "I wish my master had been with the prophet that is in Samaria. He would certainly have healed him of the leprosy." When Naaman heard this he set out for Samaria with horses and chariots.

When Naaman reached the prophet's dwelling he sent a messenger to let him know of his coming, and why he had come. Eliseus sent him word to bathe seven times in the Jordan, and he would be healed. Naaman was angry, and went away, saying: "I thought he would have come out to me, and standing, would have invoked the name of the Lord his God, and touched with his hand the place of the leprosy, and healed me. Are not the rivers of Damascus better than all the waters of Israel?" ²⁰

As he was thus turning angrily away, his servants said to him: "Father, if the prophet had bidden thee to do some great thing, surely thou wouldst have done it; how much more what he now hath said to thee, 'Wash, and thou shalt be clean'." ²¹ And Naaman, seeing that what they said was just, alighted from his chariot, bathed seven times in the Jordan, and was made clean. He returned to the man of God, and told him that now he knew for certain that there was no God but the God of Israel ²²; and he offered him presents, but Eliseus refused to receive anything.

¹⁹ Syria, with its capital, Damascus, is situated to the north-east of Israel. Naaman was the king's general, a rich and valiant man. He travelled into Israel with horses and chariots, taking much gold with him. — ²⁰ for the water of the Jordan is thick and troubled. Eliseus was humble, but he wished to impress upon Naaman, who was very proud of his position, that riches &c. are nothing in the sight of God. This was why he did not go himself to meet the great man, but sent his servant, Giezi, instead. — ²¹ His servants called Naaman, "Father," which shows that he was good to them. On their side they were very loyal to him, and affectionately counselled him to obey the prophet. — ²² Naaman was converted to faith in the true God by his wonderful cure. He had become so humble that he called himself the servant of the prophet.

Hardly had Naaman gone a little way, when Giezi, the servant of Eliseus, went after him, and said: "My master hath sent me to thee saying: 'Just now there are come to me from Mount Ephraim two young men, sons of the prophets ²³; give them a talent of silver and two changes of garments'." ²⁴

Naaman gladly gave him two talents of silver and two changes of garments. Giezi returned with the presents, and

having hidden them he stood before Eliseus. The prophet asked him where he had been, and Giezi answered that he had been nowhere.

Eliseus being angry, said: "Was not my heart present when the man turned back from his chariot?²⁵ Now thou hast money to buy oliveyards and vineyards, and sheep and oxen and men-servants and maid-servants; but the leprosy of Naaman shall stick to thee forever." And Giezi went out a leper, as white as snow²⁶.

One great miracle²⁷ the prophet wrought even after his death²⁸. It happened in this manner: On one occasion a number of men were carrying a corpse to the cemetery for burial. As they were making the grave, behold, robbers from Moab rushed in upon them. They, in their fright, cast the corpse into the sepulchre of Eliseus²⁹. No sooner had the dead man touched the bones of the prophet than he was instantly restored to life, and came forth from the tomb.

²³ The disciples of the prophets led a retired, community life of poverty, prayer and contemplation. They were, so to speak, the monks of the Old Testament. — ²⁴ Fine clothes, such as would be worn on great days and festivals. — ²⁵ God had enabled the prophet to know in the spirit exactly what had occurred. — ²⁶ He was afflicted, as it were, with leprosy upon leprosy, so that there was no part of his body which was not covered with it. — ²⁷ Among other great miracles, he raised to life the dead son of a woman of Sunam. — ²⁸ He died at an advanced age, having filled the prophetic office for sixty years (900—840 B. C.). — ²⁹ into the grave which had already been dug for Eliseus, and from which they quickly rolled the stone.

II. Commentary.

The Goodness of God towards His holy and zealous servant Elias was very great. He revived and strengthened him with a miraculous food, appeared to him most lovingly so as to comfort him, and finally took him from earth in a glorious manner, without letting him taste of the bitterness and humiliation of death.

The Omnipotence of God was shown by the supernatural power of the bread, in the strength of which Elias fasted forty days; and also by the twice repeated division of the waters of the Jordan. It was God's omnipotence which

purified the well at Jericho by a means, which, in the natural order of things, would have made the briny water more unpalatable than it was before. He cured the leprosy of Naaman, and raised the dead man to life by contact with the bones of Eliseus.

Sadness which is pleasing to God. The sadness of Elias was not sinful, but, on the contrary, praiseworthy, for it sprang from love of God and zeal for His glory; and his heart, all aglow with divine love, was sad, even unto death, when he contemplated the idolatry and impiety of the Israelites. We, too, ought to grieve when we see how much God is forgotten and offended, and how unbelief and hatred of the Church of God and her laws are ever increasing. It is to such sorrow as this that our Lord's words apply: "Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted."

A holy desire for death. We may not wish for our own death, or for that of others, from reasons of impatience or despair. Elias's desire for death arose, not from a spirit of fretfulness, but from love of God, as he was loth to witness any more offences committed against Him. Moreover, he longed to go to God. It was in this spirit that St. Paul wrote: "I have a desire to be dissolved, and be with Christ" (Phil. 1, 23).

Gentleness. The gentle sighing of the wind when Almighty God appeared to Elias was meant to indicate His goodness, mercy and patience, and to warn the fiery prophet that he too must work with patience and long-suffering. We can, as a rule, do far more for God's glory and the salvation of souls by patience and gentleness, than by violence and severity. St. Francis of Sales says: "You can catch more flies with a spoonful of honey than with a cask of vinegar." "Blessed are the meek."

The virtues and works of Elias. After Moses, Elias was the greatest of the prophets. Firstly, he was great by his virtues. He led a severe life of penance, not loving the world, but loving only solitude, prayer, and the contemplation of divine things. He was devoured by a holy zeal for God's glory and the salvation of his people. He was intrepid,

patient and strong under suffering and persecution, and was possessed of the most unshaken confidence in God. Secondly, he was great by his divine calling and his influence on the world. He preserved the true faith in Israel, he worked wonderful miracles, such as raising the dead, and was translated from earth in a marvellous manner. He is, therefore, venerated as a great saint by both Christians and Jews.

Elias, the fourteenth type of Jesus Christ. Elias was, in several respects, a type of our Lord. He was sent by God, was a prophet and a worker of miracles. He raised to life the son of the widow of Sarepta: our Lord raised to life the son of the widow of Naim. He multiplied the meal and oil: our Lord multiplied the loaves and fishes. Moreover, Elias fasted forty days in the wilderness, was hated and persecuted by the ungodly, was sorrowful even unto death, was strengthened by an angel, was translated to heaven in sight of his disciples, and will come again at the end of the world.

Faithful correspondence with grace. Eliseus was a God fearing husbandman, and was called from the plough to be the follower of the great prophet. He obeyed the call of God instantly, corresponded with grace, left his home and possessions, and served Elias. He was poor in spirit and obedient to the will of God, therefore he was singled out by God to be the recipient of special graces. "Blessed are the poor in spirit."

The fourth Commandment. Eliseus and the disciples of Elias show us by their example in what way we should love and revere teachers sent to us by God. Eliseus loved Elias as his spiritual father ("My father! My father," he cried), and when he was parted from him, he rent his garments in grief. The disciples of Elias received Eliseus with the deepest reverence as soon as they recognised him to be the spiritual heir to Elias, and a prophet chosen by God.

The relics of saints. The cloak which Elias left behind him when he was translated was a relic of the holy prophet. By means of this relic, and for the sake of the prayers and merits of Elias, God worked great miracles. By means of

the relics of Eliseus a great miracle was also wrought. If, therefore, God glorifies the relics of his saints by working miracles through them, it is certainly reasonable and pleasing to God that we should value and honour them; and the Church teaches that we ought to venerate them. She places them under the altars on which the holy Sacrifice of the Mass is offered, and exposes them for our veneration.

A type of Holy Communion. The wonderful food brought to Elias by an angel was an evident type of Holy Communion. We have before us a long and dangerous journey through the desert of this life, before we can reach heaven. During this pilgrimage God strengthens us by the most holy Sacrament, the bread of angels, in the power of which we may rise from virtue to virtue, and finally scale the holy Mount of God, heaven.

At our Lord's *Transfiguration* on Mount Thabor, Moses and Elias, on account of their high place in the kingdom of God, were allowed to speak with the Saviour of the world, the former as the representative and founder of the Law, the latter as the representative of the prophets (New Test. XXXVII).

God's Justice was manifested in the punishment of the impious children of Bethel, and the chastisement of the covetous servant Giezi.

God's Mercy sent the erring and deceived Israelites another prophet (Eliseus) in the place of Elias, and gave him the power of working mighty miracles, in order to induce the people to do penance and escape the coming judgment. How wonderfully did God's mercy reveal itself in the case of the pagan Naaman! According to human ideas the carrying off by robbers of the Israelite maiden was an unlucky accident, but by divine Providence it became the means by which the chiefs of the Syrians were made acquainted with the miracles which Eliseus worked in God's name. It was also the cause of the conversion of Naaman to the true faith. God ordained that this little maid should be taken into the service of Naaman's wife, should relate the wonderful things done by Eliseus, and should awaken in Naaman's breast the hope that the prophet might heal him of his terrible disease.

The object of miracles. Leprosy could indeed be cured, except in such aggravated cases as those of Job and Giezi,

but the cure was a very slow one. Naaman's sudden recovery was, therefore, clearly a miracle, for it was not the water of the Jordan which cured him, but the almighty power of God. God performed this miracle on the distinguished Gentile, in order that he might be converted, and that the name of God should be glorified even among the heathen. Naaman was healed in soul as well as in body.

Reverence for old age and for the servants of God. The sin committed by the boys of Bethel was great, because the person they mocked was both an old man and a prophet. They proved themselves to be bad, vicious children, full of hatred of God and His servants. Their severe punishment was sent, firstly, to prevent their reaching a mature stage of wickedness; secondly, to teach the inhabitants of Bethel to fear God and honour His prophets; and, thirdly, to serve as a warning for all time that old age is to be honoured, and all those sent by God are to be revered. "Rise up before the hoary head, and honour the person of the aged man" (Lev. 19, 32). Our Lord said, referring to the apostles and their successors: "He that heareth you, heareth Me: and he that despiseth you, despiseth Me: and he that despiseth Me, despiseth Him that sent Me" (Luke 10, 16).

Humility. Naaman's story shows us that only the humble can find favour with God. The narrative of the little maid had inspired the Syrian general with a great confidence in the power of God and the prayers of Eliseus. But when he arrived, and the prophet did not come out to meet him, to touch him and pray over him, and still more when he was told to bathe in the Jordan, his pride was aroused. He said to himself: "What, am I not even good enough for the prophet to speak to? What good can the water of the Jordan do me?" It was only when his servants reasoned with him, that he overcame his pride, and humbly obeyed the directions of the man of God. Had he not become humble and obedient, he would not have been healed either in body or soul.

Consider the *gratitude* of Naaman.

Disinterestedness of Eliseus. As he did not care for his own interests, but only for the glory of God, Eliseus found

his full reward in the conversion of the pagan Syrian, and thanked God gratefully for it.

Covetousness. Giezi, like Judas Iscariot, was a covetous man, though he had constantly before him the example of his poverty-loving master. In order to enrich himself he lied first to the Syrian and then to Eliseus, exposing the latter to a charge of avarice and perjury, for the prophet had said to Naaman: "As the Lord liveth I will take nothing." This story shows us how covetousness is a capital sin, leading to many other sins, especially to lies and deceit.

Ill-gotten gains profit nothing. The rich presents received by Giezi from Naaman were ill-gotten, for he told lies to obtain them. These ill-gotten gifts brought him no blessing. Covered with an incurable leprosy, he could enjoy neither riches nor life. He must very often have cursed his avarice and deceit, for health is of more value than gold. Many a rich invalid would give all he possesses could he thereby regain his health!

Justification of the sinner. Naaman's wonderful cure from leprosy is, according to the Fathers of the Church, a type of the sinner's justification by the Sacraments of Baptism and Penance. Leprosy represents sin, and the waters of Jordan, both the baptismal waters, and tears of contrition in the Sacrament of Penance. In Naaman's case his flesh became as the flesh of a little child: even so is the soul washed from all its sins by Baptism and Penance. But to obtain this inward purity, the sinner must, like Naaman, humble himself and fulfil the exact conditions of forgiveness.

Holy water. The blessing of the water of Jericho by Eliseus was a type of the blessing of holy water by the Church; and at the blessing of it, the miracle of Eliseus is expressly referred to. Have you ever seen how holy water is blessed, and what the priest throws into it? He throws in blessed salt, and prays in the name of the Church that the water may be freed from the influence of the evil one, and be salutary to all who use it devoutly.

Good and pious servants bring a blessing to their employers. Naaman's Israelite slave remained true to her faith though she lived among heathens, and her pious narration was the cause of Naaman being cured of his leprosy and converted to the true faith.

The free gift of grace. "There were many lepers in Israel in the time of Eliseus the prophet, yet none of them were cleansed but Naaman the Syrian" (see New Test. Chapt. XVII). Thus spoke our

Lord at Nazareth, to prove by this example that "election" was not hereditary in the family of Abraham.

III. Application.

If you want to know yourself (and without self-knowledge there can be no amendment of life), ask yourself what it is that most easily disturbs you. Do you feel sad when others are praised or rewarded? Do you feel glad when they are blamed or punished? If so, you are full of selfishness and envy. Are you put out when you cannot have your own way, or if leave is refused you to do something you wish? If so, you are self-willed and disobedient.

Never laugh about the sins of others. Remember the offence against God, and pray for the conversion of those who have sinned.

Have you ever derided old or infirm people? Do you mock at your comrades for their physical infirmities? Just think how unkind, how rude, how unjust it is to do so, for they are not responsible for their defects!

Search your conscience on the subject of lies. Even if your lies do no harm to other people they do harm to your own soul, because every lie is a sin. For the future say an "Our Father" whenever you tell a lie, and then you will keep a better watch over yourself, and will cure yourself of the detestable habit.

CHAPTER LXVI.

THE PROPHET JONAS.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

AFTER the death of Eliseus¹, the Lord wishing to show mercy to the Gentiles, raised up the prophet Jonas that he might go to Ninive², and preach penance to the inhabitants of that city. The wickedness of the pagan Ninivites had provoked the anger of God, and He had said to Jonas: "Arise, and go to Ninive and preach in it, for the wickedness thereof is come up before me."³

Jonas, however, knew that the Lord easily forgives; hence he was afraid that if he preached to the people of Ninive they would do penance, and that consequently the Lord

would spare them, while he himself would be looked upon as a false prophet. So Jonas rose up to flee from the face of the Lord⁴, and he embarked on board a ship which sailed for Tharsis. But the Lord sent a great storm, and the sea heaved and swelled, and the ship threatened to sink⁵.

Then the sailors being frightened threw into the sea all the merchandise that was on board, in order to lighten the vessel. And each one began praying to his own god for help. But Jonas was below, fast asleep; and the shipmaster went to him and said: "Why art thou asleep? Rise up, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think of us, that we may not perish!"

But the sailors, seeing that the violence of the storm continued to increase, proposed to cast lots that they might know why this evil had come upon them⁶. And they cast lots, and the lot fell upon Jonas⁷. Then Jonas confessed his sin and said: "Take me up, and cast me into the sea, and the sea shall be calm to you."

The sailors, unwilling to throw Jonas overboard, rowed very hard to gain the shore, where they might leave him in safety. But they were not able; for the sea swelled and tossed higher than ever. At last they took Jonas and cast him into the sea, and immediately the storm ceased, and the sea was calm.

At the same moment the Lord sent a great fish⁸, a whale, which opened its jaws and swallowed Jonas. And he remained three days and three nights in the belly of the whale, continually calling on God to save him, saying: "I am cast away, out of the sight of Thy eyes; but yet I shall see thy holy temple again." His prayer was heard, and on the third day the fish threw Jonas out of its mouth on the dry land.

¹ About 820 B. C. — ² The kingdom of Assyria was situated to the east of Syria. It was the greatest empire of those days, and embraced all the country between the Euphrates and the Tigris (Mesopotamia), and a large tract to the north and south of it (Media, Elam and Babylon). The capital, Ninive, the greatest city of antiquity, was on the Tigris, and was twenty-four leagues in circumference, its houses being surrounded by gardens and vineyards. The inhabitants,

who numbered about 700,000, were proud and immoral. — ³ i. e. their wickedness constrains me to punish them if they will not do penance. Jonas suspected that if the Ninivites repented God would spare them and abandon the Israelites. He wished Ninive to be destroyed, so that the Assyrians should be rendered incapable of overpowering Israel; he did not wish to preach penance to the city, through fear that God might find reason to spare it. — ⁴ He wished to avoid the mission with which God had charged him, and therefore embarked on a ship bound for Spain. The prophet knew very well that he could not escape from the omnipresent God. — ⁵ and break in pieces. — ⁶ They were convinced that some one on board must have secretly committed a great sin, and that an angry divinity had sent this terrible storm as a punishment. Even the heathens believed in retribution. — ⁷ By God's Providence. — ⁸ Probably a shark. This fish has been known to be as much as thirty feet long, and has such enormous jaws that it could easily swallow a man whole. That Jonas remained alive inside the fish, and was thrown up by it on dry land was a miracle of God's Omnipotence. Think what a state of terror Jonas must have been in while inside the fish!

And the Lord spoke a second time to Jonas, and told him to go to Ninive, the great city, and preach penance. Jonas went without delay, and entering into the city, he walked a whole day through the streets, calling out as he went: "Yet forty days, and Ninive shall be destroyed." The people of Ninive were struck with terror, knowing how guilty they were, and a general fast was proclaimed throughout the whole city, both for man and beast.

The king himself put on sackcloth and sat in ashes, and he and all his people, from the greatest to the least, fasted and did penance, in order to appease the anger of God. And because of their repentance God had mercy on the people of Ninive, and spared their city. Meanwhile, Jonas had gone out of the city, and sat down at some distance, towards the east, to see what would happen. And finding that God had spared Ninive, he was angry and much troubled ⁹, lest he should pass for a false prophet.

God however, wishing to show his prophet the unreasonableness of his anger, caused to spring up, during the night, a large vine ¹⁰, which sheltered him next day from the scorching rays of the sun. But on the following morning God sent a worm which ate up the root of the plant, and it withered away.



Now, when the sun had risen, God sent a hot and burning wind; besides the sun struck full on the head of Jonas, so that he broiled with the heat to such a degree that he desired to die. Then the Lord said to him: "Thou art grieved ^A for the ivy for which thou hast not laboured, and shall not I spare Ninive, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand persons that know not how to distinguish between their right hand and their left ¹¹, and many beasts?" Jonas, lying three days in the whale's belly, was a figure of Jesus Christ, lying three days in the tomb. So, also, Jonas coming forth alive on the third day was a figure of our Lord's Resurrection.

⁹ Because he feared that Ninive's salvation would be Israel's destruction. — ¹⁰ over his unprotected hut. — ¹¹ Whom did the Lord God mean by those who knew not their right hand from their left? Little children under seven. It was, therefore, as if He had said: "Shall I not have compassion on this great city, in which are 120,000 innocent children, who have not as yet committed any actual sin?"

II. Commentary.

God never changes! What! did He not change His intention towards Ninive? It may appear so, for first He made Jonas proclaim that the city would be destroyed in forty days, and yet, after all, He spared it! To this St. Jerome replies: "God did not change His purpose, but man changed his actions! From the first it was God's intention to be merciful

and He proclaimed the punishment in order that He might be able to show mercy." As God is ever ready to be merciful if only man will be converted, we must add to the words; 'Ninive shall be destroyed', this reservation, 'unless it do penance'. God threatened to punish the Ninivites for the express purpose of bringing them to repentance, so that, of His mercy, He might remit the punishment with which His justice had threatened them.

The Omnipotence of God stirred up the storm at sea, and instantly calmed it, made the lot to fall on Jonas, sent the fish to swallow him, kept him alive inside it, made it cast him up on dry land, and caused the rapid growth and as rapid decay of the plant which gave shelter to the prophet. Everything is in the hands of Almighty God, the elements obey Him, and the animals do His will.

The Goodness and Holiness of God. God loves little children, because they are innocent, and have not committed any actual sin; and for the sake of them He had mercy on the whole city.

The Justice of God. God punished the disobedience of Jonas by stirring up the storm on his account, by letting him be devoured by the fish, and keeping him shut up inside it in a state of mortal fear.

The Mercy of God. He showed His mercy to Jonas first; and then to the Ninivites. "As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and life" (Ez. 33, 11).

The faith and repentance of the Ninivites was very edifying. In spite of the wonderful words and deeds of Elias, most of the Israelites had remained impenitent. Then God turned to the Gentiles, who showed more good-will and faith than the chosen people. The Ninivites believed the word of the Lord as soon as the prophet announced it to them; and they practised penance with prayer and fasting, when he quoted his own miraculous deliverance as a sign that God had sent him (Luke 11, 30). Our Lord Himself held up the Ninivites as an example to the hard-hearted Israelites, when He said: "The men of Ninive shall rise in judgment with this generation and shall condemn it; because they did

penance at the preaching of Jonas—and behold a greater than Jonas is here” (see New Test. XXVII). How disgraceful would it be for Christians if they allowed themselves to be outdone in faith and penance by the Ninivites!

True conversion. Jonas sinned by refusing to obey God’s command. But he saw, repented of, and confessed his sin, and in his repentance declared himself willing to suffer death by drowning. His conversion was sincere, for immediately after his miraculous deliverance he set off for Ninive to execute God’s commission. The surest proof of conversion is to be willing to do God’s will, no matter how hard it be.

Fasting is, as we can see by this story, a work of penance well-pleasing to God. Therefore the Church, in order to kindle and increase our ardour for penance, has prescribed fixed fasting days.

The good works of sinners. The Ninivites were not in a state of grace when they performed their good works of prayer, fasting &c., for they were great sinners. Nevertheless, these good works were not useless, for they availed to avert the threatened judgment, and to win for many of the inhabitants the grace of conversion.

Jonas, the fifteenth type of Jesus Christ. Jonas was a type of the Divine Redeemer. Our Lord Himself teaches us this when He says (see New Test. XXVII): “An adulterous generation seeketh after a sign, and a sign shall not be given it but the sign of Jonas the prophet. For, as Jonas was in the whale’s belly three days and three nights, so shall the Son of man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights.” Jonas is also a type of our Lord in other ways. He was sent not only to the Jews but also to the Gentiles: our Lord came and died for both Jews and Gentiles. Jonas offered himself up to die of his free-will, to appease God’s anger, and save his fellow passengers. Our Lord went willingly to death, in order to satisfy the divine justice, and save us, His brethren, from eternal death.

Revelation to the Gentiles. God showed mercy to the Gentiles and manifested Himself to them. The sojourn of Jacob and his descendants in Egypt, as also Moses’s great miracles in the desert, had served to

make God more or less known among the Gentiles. Elias was sent to Sarepta, and there worked miracles in God's name among the heathen. Eliseus cured the Syrian, Naaman, and thereby made known God's almighty power to the pagan Syrians. Jonas was sent by God to the greatest city of the pagan world to preach penance to its inhabitants, and make known to them the Omnipotence, Justice, and Mercy of the unseen God.

Relapse into sin. Two hundred years after, when the Ninivites had returned to their former state of wickedness; and, this time, remained impenitent, God's threatened judgment fell on them. The abominable city was entirely destroyed and levelled to the ground, 606 B. C. This shows us how dangerous it is to fall back into sin.

Cruelty to animals. God showed mercy even to the beasts in Nineve, for they too are his creatures. How good it would be if men would take pity on beasts, and refrain from ill-treating them.

III. Application.

Do you take compassion on your unfortunate fellow creatures? Do you do your best to comfort them and help them? Or do you rejoice when any evil or punishment overtakes them? Are you ever cruel to animals?

Are you sorry for your sins? What have you done to make satisfaction for them? You could very well forego some pleasure at times, or deny yourself in eating, and offer these acts of self-denial to God as a penance for your sins. Try every day to arouse feelings of compunction in your heart!

FINAL OVERTHROW OF THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL (718 B. C.).

CHAPTER LXVII.

TOBIAS DURING THE CAPTIVITY OF BABYLON.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

THE Lord ceased not to send to the Israelites holy prophets who preached penance to them both by word and example¹. But the Israelites would not be converted², and their wickedness increased to such an extent that the Almighty resolved to punish them in His wrath, and utterly

to destroy them. He therefore caused Salmanazar, king of Assyria, to come against them with a mighty army. He laid siege to the strong city of Samaria³, and after three years took it, and carried off most of its inhabitants⁴, and thus the kingdom of Israel ceased to exist⁵.

The Israelites having been slain or carried off into captivity, their land had become almost a wilderness⁶, and the Assyrian king, in order to people it again, sent thither thousands of his pagan subjects, who, settling amongst the scattered remains of the ten tribes, were soon so mixed up with them that they became, as it were, a new nation, and scarcely a trace remained of the people of Israel.

Those of this mixed race who settled in the northern part of the country were called Galileans; those who lived in the south were called Samaritans, from Samaria, the ancient capital of the kingdom; and those who dwelt beyond the Jordan were called Pereans. The religion of these districts was a mixture of Judaism and Paganism⁷; hence they hated the two tribes of Juda and Benjamin, who had remained true to the old religion.

¹ Among these prophets were Osee and Amos, who announced the judgments of God which were to come. — ² They lived according to their evil passions, and gave themselves over to all manner of vices. The prophet Osee (4, 2 and 11) thus describes the moral condition of the people: "Cursing, and lying, and killing, and theft, and adultery have overflowed. Wine and drunkenness take away the understanding." Sedition, regicide and civil war became more and more common. —

³ He encamped all round the town, so that no necessities of life could be brought to it. — ⁴ Imagine to yourselves with what tears and aching hearts they must have left their homes. Now, no doubt, they repented of their sins and deplored their blindness; but it was too late. The Israelites were divided among the towns in Northern Assyria, and were much hampered in the free practice of their religion. — ⁵ being merged in the Assyrian Empire. — ⁶ because its inhabitants were very few, and the land only partially cultivated. — ⁷ They worshipped false gods at the same time that they worshipped the Almighty. It was only later that they abandoned idolatry, and built a temple to the Lord on Mount Garizim, near Sichar.

Those who were taken captive to Assyria never returned to their own country. Still God did not fail to give numerous

proofs of His watchful care over those unhappy exiles. One of the most remarkable of these instances is found in the history of the good Tobias⁸. When he was in his own country, and in his earliest years, Tobias never associated with the wicked; never went to adore the golden calf, but kept the law of the Lord exactly⁹.

Hence, God protected him in the land of captivity, and caused him to find favour in the sight of Salmanazar, who allowed him to go wherever he wished. He went, accordingly to all his fellow captives, consoling and encouraging them. He shared with them all he possessed, fed them when they were hungry, and clothed them when naked. His life was spent in such works of charity.

⁸ He lived in Ninive, the capital of Assyria. — ⁹ Although he lived in Israel, and not Juda, he did not go to Bethel to worship the golden calf as did most of his fellow countrymen. He faithfully observed all the rules laid down for the worship of God, and for the offering of sacrifices.

King Salmanazar being dead, Sennacherib, his son, who succeeded him on the throne, was not so favourable to Tobias, and put many of the Israelites to death¹⁰. But Tobias, fearing God more than the king, hid the bodies of his brethren in his house, and buried them by night. The king, having heard this, sentenced Tobias to death, and took away all his property.

Tobias fled with his wife and son, and remained concealed in a place of safety, till the death of the wicked king, who forty days later was killed by his own sons. Then Tobias returned, and all his property was restored to him. But the persecution against the Israelites was still raging, so Tobias resumed his former works of charity, relieving the distressed, and burying the dead.

Coming home one day very much fatigued, he lay down near the wall and fell asleep. While he was sleeping, the hot dung from a swallow's nest fell on his eyes and made him blind¹¹. This was a great affliction, but it did not prevent Tobias from fearing and blessing God, and thanking Him for all his mercies, even for this new trial. Now Anna, his wife, was his only support. She went out every day to

work, and by her hard earnings kept her husband from want. On one occasion, Anna received a young kid for the labour of her hands, and she brought it home. Now Tobias, hearing it bleat, was afraid, and said: "Take heed, lest perhaps it be stolen¹²; restore it to its owner." He questioned Anna as to how she got the kid. Now Anna was a good and virtuous woman, but this suspicion of her husband roused her to anger. She replied very sharply, and made use of words that were aggravating to her husband¹³. Tobias, however, only sighed and began to pray.

¹⁰ In revenge for a great defeat he had suffered before Jerusalem (as will be told in Chapt. LXXIII). When Sennacherib learnt that Tobias buried the dead, he gave orders for him to be put to death. Tobias, however, hid himself and continued to bury the dead. —

¹¹ Inflammation set in and blindness ensued. This was a severe trial for Tobias; however he did not complain, but, like Job, daily thanked God for even the sufferings sent to him. — ¹² He had reasons for doubting the honesty of the giver of the kid. — ¹³ reproaching him for having given away all his substance.

II. Commentary.

The Patience and Justice of God. God was very patient with His ungrateful people. He continued to send prophets who, in stirring language, pointed out to the people their ingratitude and faithlessness towards God, and graphically described the judgments which would overtake them. For two hundred years and more God visited them with famines and other tribulations in the hope of bringing them back to Him, but all in vain! Ninive did penance, but Israel remained impenitent! At last, Almighty God's patience was exhausted, His judgment fell, and the faithless kingdom of Israel came to an end! "Justice exalteth a nation: but sin maketh nations miserable" (Prov. 14, 34).

God's Mercy and Wisdom. Even in His punishments, God showed mercy. As a nation, Israel was overthrown, but the punishment served for the conversion of individuals. The Israelites had been driven from the land of their fathers, they were scattered and homeless, living among strangers, and earning a livelihood by hard work, being all the while sorely oppressed. In their necessity many turned contritely to God,

acknowledged His just judgments, and found all their consolation in the hope of the promised Redeemer. In them were fulfilled the words of the prophet Jeremias (2, 19):
 ..A "Know thou and see that it is an evil and a bitter thing for thee to have left the Lord thy God." For the kingdom of Assyria also, the dispersion of Israel was a great blessing. Through the Israelites living in their midst the pagans learnt to know the true and unseen God, and the promised Redeemer, for Whose coming they were, therefore, prepared. Thus, by God's providence, even the sin of Israel and its punishment served for a good end.

The Faithfulness of God. That which God had threatened a hundred years before was brought to pass. The impenitent kingdom of Israel was merged in the great Assyrian Empire, and ceased to be an independent state.

The fall of him who resists grace. The history of Israel is the counterpart of the history of every impenitent sinner. What happened to the people of Israel when they broke their covenant with God, is repeated in the case of very many Christians, who do not keep their baptismal vows. By the mouth of His priests, and by the voice of their own consciences, God exhorts sinners to be converted and do penance. He reminds them of the terrors of the judgment and the torments of hell. But, alas, many sinners will not believe, and take these solemn truths of faith for empty threats. Often God visits sinners with sickness or misfortunes, but the amendment of life which these may produce lasts but a short time. Hardly is the trouble removed before the sinner turns away again from God and commits fresh sins. God will bear with him for a long time, seeking to bring him back to Him, but, at last, His patience is exhausted, the time of grace is past, and God calls the impenitent sinner before His judgment-seat, and gives him over to the power of the enemy. The sinful soul is damned, and thrust for ever out of its heavenly home, to suffer hopelessly, in captivity, the unbearable torments of hell. There, indeed, he at last recognizes his folly and blindness, and bitterly rues his sin and impenitence. But it is too late!

Let us see what virtues Tobias exercised:

Above all, *piety*. He loved God from his youth up, prayed willingly, and faithfully fulfilled all his religious duties. The foundations of piety are laid in youth.

Then, he evinced the most *sincere, practical, and universal brotherly love*. His love was *universal*, for he did not show it towards his friends only, but towards all who were in want, especially Israelites. His love was *practical*, for he sought out the needy, even sacrificing health and fortune in order to help them. He *consoled, instructed, and supported* all whom he could, and practised works of mercy towards the living and the dead. He did *everything in secret*, and sought his own glory in nothing. He asked for no reward from man, for no thanks, no honours. This proves that his love was *sincere*.

Moreover Tobias evinced great *fortitude*. He did not shrink from the perils and labour of long journeys, nor did he fear the *anger of the king*. He exposed himself to every danger to help the needy, and bury the dead.

He also exercised the virtue of *justice*, by conscientiously performing his duty towards God and man. This rudimentary virtue of justice proceeded from his uprightness, which made him, though poor, refuse any reward which he had not justly earned. He said to himself: "If the person who gave us this kid, stole it, it is not his property, and he has no right to give it; and as for me, I may neither buy nor receive as a gift any stolen goods."

Patience in suffering is the fruit of faith. Tobias was specially distinguished for his great patience and resignation under suffering. He did not murmur against God, or say to himself: "What have I done to deserve these trials? Have I not feared God from my youth up?" No, he accepted his trials humbly, as a punishment for his own sins and those of his people (Tob. 3, 2 f.); he thanked God for them, and set all his hopes on a future life. "For we are the children of the saints", said he, "and look for that life which God will give to those that never change their faith in Him" (Tob. 2, 18). The belief in a future reward comforted him and supported him in the midst of

his tribulations. Faith makes people patient and contented under suffering; but a man without faith is without comfort in tribulation, and without hope in death. Poor, unfortunate man!

The object of suffering. Why did God permit so many troubles to overtake the holy, faithful Tobias? The Angel Raphael explained the reason when he said to him: "Because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee" (Tob. 12, 13). Suffering, therefore, was intended to serve as a probation of Tobias, and to give him the opportunity of practising patience, and gaining more merit. Holy Scripture offers a further explanation of the reason for this holy man's tribulations in the following passage: "Now this trial (of blindness) the Lord therefore permitted to happen to him, that an example might be given to posterity of his patience, as in the case of holy Job" (Tob. 2, 12).

The bodies of the dead are worthy of reverence. Why did Tobias expose himself to such great danger in order to bury mere dead bodies? He knew and believed that man is an image of God, so he could not endure the thought that men's bodies should lie uncared for, to be devoured by wild beasts. The bodies of Christians, furthermore, are the temples of the Holy Ghost, and sanctified by the reception of the holy sacraments. For this reason they are buried in consecrated ground.

Lawful obedience. Was it not wrong of Tobias to continue to bury the dead after Sennacherib had forbidden it? No, it was rather Sennacherib who did wrong in ordering the dead bodies to be left unburied, for God had commanded, writing it on men's hearts, that the bodies of the dead should be treated reverently, and buried.

III. Application.

Dear children, none of you would wish to suffer eternally, to be shut out forever from the presence of God, and banished from heaven. Lay to heart, therefore, the teaching and holy exhortations which you receive, obey God's grace, avoid sin, and do heartfelt penance for the sins you have heretofore committed.

Do you think any one will ever be able to say of you: "He has from his youth up observed the commandments of God, and avoided the society of the wicked"?

Do you possess any ill-gotten goods? Have you ever taken anything, even a trifle such as a picture, a pen, or an apple, from any one? Give it back at once, or if you no longer possess it, make compensation for it? Do you ever take sugar &c. from your parents' stores? What a shame for a child to steal from his own parents!

Even you could practise many works of mercy. Do you look after your sick comrades? Do you pray for the holy souls? You could prevent many a sin by gently appealing to the consciences of your comrades, or brothers and sisters, showing them what they ought to do.

CHAPTER LXVIII.

PARTING ADVICE OF TOBIAS TO HIS SON. DEPARTURE OF YOUNG TOBIAS.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

TOBIAS, seeing himself surrounded by so many miseries, thought he could not live much longer. He, therefore, called his son, and said: "My son, when God shall take my soul, thou shalt bury my body; and thou shalt honour thy mother all the days of her life; for thou must be mindful what and how great perils she has suffered for thee¹. And when she also shall have ended the time of her life, bury her by me.

"And all the days of thy life have God in thy mind², and take heed thou never consent to sin³, nor transgress the commandments of the Lord our God. Give alms out of thy substance, and turn not thy face away from any poor person. If thou hast much, give abundantly; if thou have little, take care even so to bestow willingly a little. For alms deliver from sin and death, and will not suffer the soul to go into darkness. Take heed to keep thyself, my son, from all fornication.

"Never suffer pride to reign in thy mind, nor in thy word, for from it all perdition took its beginning⁴. If any man has done work for thee, pay him his hire. See thou never do to another what thou wouldst hate to have done to thee by another. Bless God at all times⁵, and desire of him to

direct thy ways⁶, and that all thy counsels may abide in Him.”⁷

.. A Then the son answered, saying: “I will do all these things, father, which thou hast commanded me.”

¹ Peril to life and health. A child comes helpless into the world, and for many years requires much care on the part of its mother. A mother has to endure much for the sake of her children: pain, sleepless nights, anxiety, care, labour and fatigue. — ² fearing Him and loving Him. — ³ i. e. to sin wilfully. — ⁴ Both the fallen angels and our first parents sinned through pride. — ⁵ in health and in sickness, in prosperity and adversity. — ⁶ “that His providence may watch over you, and may keep you in the way of His commandments.” — ⁷ “Fear not, my son,” he added; “we lead indeed a poor life; but we shall have many good things (grace and consolations on earth and eternal glory in heaven), if we fear God and depart from all sin; and do that which is good.”

Tobias, having thus advised his son, sent him to Rages⁸, a distant city, to collect a debt of long standing⁹. And the young Tobias, not knowing the road, went out to seek a guide who would show him the way.

He had not gone far when he met a beautiful young man, standing ready girt as for a journey. It was the Archangel Raphael¹⁰. Tobias did not know who the young man was, . A but he addressed him, saying: “Good young man, knowest thou the way that leadeth to the country of the Medes?” The Angel answered: “I know it.” Then the young Tobias introduced him to his father, who asked him: “Canst thou conduct my son to Gabelus, at Rages?”

The young man replied: “I will conduct him thither, and bring him back to thee.” Then Tobias blessed the two young men, praying: “May you have a good journey; may God be with you on your way, and may His angel accompany you.”¹¹ Then they both set out on their journey, and the dog followed them. But his mother wept and said to her husband: “Thou hast taken the staff of our old age, and hast sent him away.”

On the evening of the first day the travellers reached the banks of the river Tigris. Tobias, heated and warm, sat down on the bank and put his feet into the water¹².



Suddenly an enormous fish came up to devour him¹³. Tobias cried out to the Angel: "Sir, he cometh upon me!" The Angel, seeing his terror, exclaimed: "Take him by the gill and draw him to thee." He did so, and when the fish lay panting before his feet, the Angel said: "Take out his heart, his gall and his liver, for these are useful medicines." Then, making a fire, Tobias broiled some of the fish which furnished a repast; then he salted a portion of what remained, to serve as provision for the journey.

When they came to a certain city, Tobias said to his guide: "Where wilt thou that we lodge?" The Angel answered: "There is here a man named Raguel, a kinsman of thy tribe, who has a daughter named Sara: and thou must take her to wife." Tobias replied: "I hear that she⁵ hath been given to seven husbands, and they all died, and a devil killed each of them on the night of his wedding."⁵⁵

Tobias said this, because he was the only son of his aged parents, and if such a misfortune should befall him, it would bring down their old age with sorrow to the grave.

The Angel answered that the devil had such power over those who in their marriage banish God from their heart, and think only of gratifying their passions. "But thou," he continued, "when thou shalt take her¹⁴, give thyself for three days to nothing else than to prayer; then the devil shall be driven away, and you shall obtain a blessing."

Having entered into the house of Raguel, Tobias made himself known, and was warmly received by Raguel, as the son of an old friend and of a most worthy man. At the same time Anna, the wife of Raguel, and Sara, his daughter, wept for joy. They then prepared a repast for the travellers, and Raguel prayed them to sit down to eat. Tobias told him that he would neither eat nor drink till he promised to give him Sara, his daughter, in marriage.

Raguel seemed to hesitate, but the Angel told him not to be afraid to give his daughter to the young man, for that he feared the Lord. Then Raguel consented, and taking his daughter's right hand, placed it in that of Tobias, saying: "The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob be with you; may he join you together, and fulfil his blessing in you."

Then they sat down to eat. And Tobias and Sara spent three days in prayer, after which the devil had no power to harm them. Then, at the request of Tobias, the Angel took the note of hand, went to the country of the Medes, collected the money from Gabelus, and returned with Gabelus to be present at the wedding.

Gabelus came with great joy, and when he saw the young husband he wept and embraced him, saying: "The God of Israel bless thee, because thou art the son of a very good and just man, and that feareth God, and doeth alms-deeds. And may a blessing come upon thy wife."

⁸ This town is 900 miles east of Ninive. — ⁹ When Tobias was rich he had lent a considerable sum of money to a poor Israelite, without charging any interest. — ¹⁰ who had assumed the form of a noble looking youth. — ¹¹ He had no suspicion that his pious prayer had been answered even before it was uttered. — ¹² to wash off the dust. — ¹³ It opened wide its jaws, as if it were going to

devour Tobias. — ¹⁴ when she has given herself to be thy wife and thou hast married her.

II. Commentary.

The elder Tobias is the model of a good father. By word and example he brought up his son from his earliest youth in the fear of God. When the time came that he expected to die, he forcibly re-iterated the most important points of his teaching, and his exhortations must have made all the greater impression on the son, because the father preached nothing that he had not himself constantly practised. Tobias cared for the salvation of his son's soul more than anything, and therefore he admonished him above all things to avoid sin and especially to cultivate the virtues of filial piety, the fear of God, justice, brotherly love, gentleness and a great confidence in God.

The younger Tobias is the model of a good son. He listened eagerly to his father's beautiful exhortations, and made this promise: "I will do all these things, father, which thou hast commanded me." He kept this promise most faithfully, as you will see by what follows. If a child does not receive his parents' advice willingly, he sins against that obedience which he owes them.

The connexion between the First and Fourth Commandments. Tobias's exhortation shows us how very important the observance of the Fourth Commandment is for children. Does it not strike you as strange that his first exhortation should be: "Honour thy mother &c." and that he should only say afterwards: "Have God in thy mind &c.?" There is a reason for this, because reverence for parents is, so to speak, at the root of religion and of the fear of God. He who does not love and honour his parents, who are his visible benefactors, will not love and honour God, Who is his invisible Father and Benefactor. That son who does not observe the Fourth Commandment, is an ungrateful and irreligious man.

Defrauding of wages. Among his other exhortations Tobias said to his son: "If any man has done work for thee, pay him his hire." This is a duty of justice. He who does not give his promised wages to the labourer, that lives by the

work of his hands, commits one of the four sins which cry to heaven for vengeance.

Death is the separation of soul and body. Tobias said to his son: "When God shall take my soul, thou shalt bury my body." By death the soul is parted from the body, and God calls it before Him to be judged. The body, meanwhile, returns to the earth, until God shall raise it up at the last day, and re-unite it for ever to the body.

The enemies of our souls are all those things which lead to mortal sin. They who commit grievous sins are enemies not only to God and their neighbour, but also to their own soul; because they rob it of God's grace, and plunge it into everlasting ruin.

Preparation for the married state. The Angel urged young Tobias to enter into the married state, but he recommended him to begin his married life by three days of prayer. All those who wish to enter the state of matrimony ought to prepare themselves for it by prayer and the sacrament; for marriage is a holy state.

III. Application.

Lay to heart the exhortations of old Tobias just as if your own father had spoken them to you on his death-bed. Ask yourself every day whether you have acted up to his teaching.

Have you always gladly followed the advice of your father and mother? Are your parents obliged to find fault with you very often? Have you ever grieved or angered them? You cannot be a child of God if you do not honour and obey your parents? Whenever they bid you do anything, say to yourself, in the words of the young Tobias: "I will do all these things, father (or mother), which thou hast commanded me."

CHAPTER LXIX.

TOBIAS RETURNS HOME.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

FOURTEEN days had passed since the marriage of Tobias, and his parents at home began to be exceedingly sad, and they wept together because their son did not return. But his mother was quite disconsolate, and she groaned and

sighed: "Woe, woe is me, my son, why did we send thee to a strange country; the light of our eyes, the staff of our old age, the comfort of our life, the hope of our posterity!" Then Tobias said to her: "Hold thy peace, our son is safe." Yet she would not be comforted, but went out into all the ways that she might see him coming afar off.

Now Tobias the younger said to Raguel: "I know that my parents count the days, and their spirit is afflicted within them."¹ However, Raguel pressed him to stay a little longer, but in vain. He then gave him Sara his wife, and the half of all he possessed, saying: "May the holy angel of the Lord be with you in your journey, and bring you through safely, and that you may find all things well about your parents."

When the travellers had made half the journey homeward, the Angel said to Tobias: "Let us go before and let the family softly follow after us."² They did so, and Raphael told Tobias to take with him the gall of the fish, because it would be very useful.

Meanwhile Anna sat daily beside the way on the hill-top; and while she watched, she saw him coming far off. When she was sure that it was her son coming, she ran to tell her husband. She had scarcely done so when the dog which had accompanied her son on the journey, running before, reached the house, wagging his tail and jumping for joy, as if he had brought the news. Thereupon, the elder Tobias, blind as he was, groped his way and went out to meet his son. And they all wept for joy.

Young Tobias then rubbed his father's eyes with the gall of the fish, and he saw³; and the old man exclaimed: "I bless Thee, O Lord God of Israel, because Thou hast chastised me, and Thou hast saved me, and, behold, I see Tobias, my son!" Seven days after, Sara and her retinue arrived, and completed the joy of that favoured and happy household.

¹ Being full of trouble and anxiety about me. — ² Tobias hastened on to relieve his parents' anxiety as soon as possible, while Sara travelled after him more leisurely, with the servants, camels, flocks and herds which her father had given her. — ³ This cure was

miraculous, because it followed immediately after the application of the remedy, and because this remedy was unknown before, and is so still.

Then the son related to his parents all the benefits he had received from the young man, his guide. He said they could never repay him for all they had done for him, but asked his father's permission to give him one half of the money he had received from Gabelus.

The father willingly consented, and they pressed the young man to accept the money. But the heavenly messenger said to them: "Bless ye the God of heaven, and give glory to Him⁴ in the sight of all that live; because He hath shown His mercy to you⁵. Prayer is good with fasting and alms, more than to lay up treasures of gold. When thou didst pray with tears, and didst bury the dead, I offered thy prayer to the Lord.

AA" And because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee⁶. The Lord hath sent me to heal thee, and to deliver Sara, thy son's wife, from the devil. For I am the Angel Raphael, one of the seven who stand before the throne of God."⁷ Hearing this⁸, they were seized with fear, and all fell prostrate on the ground. Still the Angel told them not to fear, but to bless and thank the Lord, Who had sent him to do His holy will in their regard.

Having spoken thus, he vanished from their sight, leaving the little family lost in wonder and full of gratitude to God⁹. The elder Tobias lived forty two years after these events to share in the happiness of his family, and died at the age of one hundred and two years. Tobias, his son, lived to be very old; he saw the children of his children, who remained faithful, and were beloved by God and man.

⁴ And not to me. — ⁵ The reasons why God had shown mercy to him are given in the words that follow, "prayer with fasting &c." — ⁶ to prove that your piety and fear of God were true, genuine and persevering. — ⁷ the seven who serve the Lord, and are always ready to carry out God's gracious designs regarding men. Michael, Gabriel and Raphael are Archangels. — ⁸ The thought that one of God's great angels should have visited them, filled them with a holy awe. — ⁹ After the Angel's disappearance they remained on their faces for three hours, praising God.

II. Commentary.

The Goodness of God. This story of Tobias shows us most clearly how good God is to His servants. He gave old Tobias a good son; He sent His Angel in the form of a man to guide him; He gave the son a rich and virtuous wife; He cured the father, granted him a happy old age in the midst of God-fearing children and grand-children, and blessed his family for many generations. God changed Tobias's suffering to great joy; for who could describe the father's happiness when, after four years of blindness, he once more saw standing before him his beloved son, on whose account he had endured so much anxiety! The sufferings he had gone through made his present joy all the greater. God sends tribulations to the just, in order that He may reward their patience with great joys, given often in this world, but anyhow in heaven.

The blessings brought by piety. St. Paul (1 Tim. 4, 8) writes thus: "Godliness is profitable in all things, having the promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come." Piety made old Tobias a good father, training his son in virtue; it kept him from sin, and urged him to the ceaseless practice of good works; it won for him the favour of King Salmanazar, and gave him patience under his sufferings, filling him with consolation. Piety made the young Tobias to be an affectionate and dutiful son, a virtuous youth and a holy man, the joy and support of his parents. It drew down on both father and son God's protection and blessing on earth, and untold glory in heaven. True interior piety cannot be too highly valued.

The love of parents for their children is fully illustrated by this story. Also,

The filial love of children for their parents. In young Tobias was fulfilled the promise attached to the observance of the Fourth Commandment: "that thy days may be long in the land &c."

Guardian Angels. This story fully confirms the Catholic doctrine about guardian angels. Tobias's parting words to his son: "May God's angel accompany you", plainly show that he believed in the protection of guardian angels. By

Raphael's actions we can see what it is that our guardian angels do for us, since they do for us in an invisible manner just what he did, visibly, for young Tobias. He guided him, protected him on his long and perilous journey, showed him what was the right thing to do, and prayed for him and his father. This is what our guardian angels do for us. The Angel's words: "When thou didst pray with tears, and bury the dead, I offered thy prayer to the Lord", show us plainly that the holy angels know all about our prayers, sufferings and labours, and carry our prayers and good works before the throne of God, uniting their prayers to ours, and interceding for us. The example of Tobias shows us how we ought to conduct ourselves towards our holy guardian. Tobias revered the holy Angel, obeyed his directions, executed his commands, called on him in the hour of danger, and showed him the most heartfelt gratitude.

Humility of the holy Archangel Raphael. He gave all the glory to God.

Gratitude shown by the old and young Tobias towards their benefactor. They wished to give him half of what they possessed. Gratitude is pleasing, whereas everybody detests ingratitude.

Good works. The Angel of God praised Tobias on account of his prayers, fasting and alms-deeds, thereby putting such works before us as excellent, and pleasing to God. Under the head of "prayer" we are to understand all acts of worship both interior and exterior; for Tobias did not merely pray, but offered sacrifice, and went to Jerusalem for the great feasts of God. Under the head of "fasting" are included all acts of mortification. Tobias observed all the laws regarding abstinence from certain food: he shortened his night's rest to bury the dead, and bore all his sufferings with patience and resignation. Under the head of alms-deeds we are to understand all the works of mercy which Tobias practised to such a great degree, comforting the afflicted, feeding the hungry, and burying the dead. Now, why are these good works enjoined on us? Firstly, because by prayer we prove our love of God, by fasting our love of ourselves, and by

alms-deeds our love of our neighbour. ² Secondly, because these three good works, united, represent the most perfect offering which we can make to God, for by prayer we offer Him our soul, by fasting, our body, and by alms, all we possess. ³ Thirdly, because these three good works are the best weapons against our three enemies: by prayer we can fight against pride, by fasting, against the lust of the flesh, and by alms-deeds, against the lust of the eye.

Imperishable treasures. Why is "prayer, with fasting and alms, better than laying up treasures of gold"? Because gold and earthly treasures can be taken away from us, and must inevitably be taken away by death, whereas our prayers and other meritorious works are real treasures which no one can take away from us, but which will go into eternity with us, and obtain for us a favourable judgment. Earthly treasures make it difficult to die, but heavenly treasures make it easy. Therefore, our Divine Saviour says: "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven" (New Test. XXI).

The prayer of praise and thanksgiving. A great many men err by offering up only prayers of petition, quite neglecting either to praise or thank Almighty God. The Angel expressly urged Tobias to offer up prayers of praise and thanksgiving, and Tobias was in the habit of doing so.

The sufferings of the just serve the double purpose of proving them and of increasing their merits. "Because thou wast acceptable to God, it was necessary that temptation should prove thee", said the Angel to Tobias.

Great awe and veneration were experienced by both father and son when they discovered that an angel of the Most High had appeared to them in the form of a man. "Being seized with fear they fell upon their faces on the ground." How much more reverence ought we to feel each time we are in the presence of the most holy Sacrament, in which our Lord is really and personally present with His Divinity and sacred Humanity.

A good education produces good fruit for several generations. Tobias the younger, having received a good education from his father, brought up his own children in the fear of the Lord; and they too, in their turn, brought up their children well. So it happened that the descendants of Tobias "continued in good life and in holy conversation, and thus were acceptable both to God and man".

The wings of prayer. Our prayers should be joined to fasting and alms-deeds, or in other words to works of self-denial and charity. By this means they have greater power, are more pleasing to God, and are more surely heard. The holy Fathers say, therefore: "Fasting and alms are the two wings with which our prayers fly to heaven".

III. Application.

Do you keep in your mind that your holy guardian angel is always with you? Do you commend yourself to his care, and obey his inspirations?

Do you take pains, like young Tobias, to be a joy to your parents, and to spare them anxiety and vexation? Do you return home as soon as you can, when you are sent out by them on an errand?

DECLINE OF THE KINGDOM OF JUDA.

CHAPTER LXX.

THE PROPHETS JOEL AND MICHEAS. (790—730 B. C.)

I. Narrative and Explanation.

GOD also sent to the inhabitants of the kingdom of Juda a great number of prophets, whose powerful voice was heard throughout the land calling them to repentance¹. Many times did their words produce the desired effect, and bring the people to repentance, and for a while they served God with fidelity and sincerity.

Unhappily these returns to virtue and religion were of short duration². Then it was that the prophets, with sorrowful hearts, began to announce to the rebellious people the downfall of their country³, and the only consolation left to the prophets was the thought of the Messias, whose coming they saw more clearly as time went on.

M. The prophet Joel spoke to the people in these terms: "Hear this, ye old men, and give ear, all ye inhabitants of the land. Blow the trumpet in Sion, sound an alarm in my

holy mountain; because the day of the Lord comes; because it is nigh at hand. A day of darkness and of gloom; a day of clouds and whirlwinds; a numerous people and a strong people, as the morning spread upon the mountains. Before the face thereof a devouring fire, and behind it a burning flame. Sacrifices and oblations have ceased to be offered in the house of the Lord. Rend your hearts and not your garments, and turn to the Lord your God. Between the portico and the altar, the priests, the Lord's ministers, shall weep and shall say: "Spare, O Lord, spare Thy people."

The prophet Micheas is not less terrible in his warning: "Hear, all ye peoples," he cries out, "and let the earth give ear. I will make Samaria as a heap of stones! I will bring down the stones thereof into the valley, and will lay her foundations bare. Hear this, ye princes of the house of Jacob; you that abhor judgment, and pervert all that is right; you who build up Sion with blood, and Jerusalem with iniquity. Therefore, on account of you, Sion shall be ploughed as a field, and Jerusalem shall be as a heap of stones; and the mountain of the Temple as the high places of the forests. And thou Bethlehem Ephrata, art a little one among the thousands of Juda; out of thee shall He come forth unto me that is to be the Ruler in Israel; and His going forth is from the beginning, from the days of eternity."

These prophecies have been all literally fulfilled. The prophecy about Bethlehem refers to the Saviour, so that the Jews might know that the Redeemer promised to Adam, to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, to Juda, and to David would be born in Bethlehem.

¹ Proclaiming and foretelling the judgments of God. — ² Terrible impurity, sorcery, and superstitions of all kinds, reigned among the chosen people. Of the twenty kings who ruled over Juda the greater number shamelessly served idols. Achaz and Manasses even offered up their own children in sacrifice to the false god, Moloch. Achaz closed the Temple; Manasses set up altars to the false gods in the outer court of it. — ³ foretelling such punishments as invasions of the enemy, despoiling of cities, devastation of the country &c. &c. Manasses was cast into prison, loaded with chains, and carried off to Babylon; and many kings were murdered by conspirators.

II. Commentary.

Evil passions are at the root of unbelief. It seems almost incredible that, although God had made Himself known to them in such marvellous ways, so many of the kings of Israel and of Juda should have fallen away from Him. Their apostasy shows us the enormous power of those human passions which obscure the reason. The idolatrous kings knew the true God, but they refused to acknowledge Him, because His commandments put a curb on their passions. The worship of false gods, which encouraged sensuality, and was not opposed to despotism or extravagance, was preferable to them, for while practising it they were free to live according to their lusts. Therefore, they turned their hearts from God and set up a senseless idolatry which permitted them to do exactly as they wished!

III. Application.

Bear in mind that the evil passions of the heart are to-day, as they were in the days of the kings of Juda, the principal cause of unbelief in the eternal and true God.

CHAPTER LXXI.

KING OZIAS, WISHING TO USURP THE PRIESTLY FUNCTIONS, IS STRICKEN WITH LEPROSY.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

OZIAS was one of the few faithful kings who reigned in Juda. He reigned fifty-two years, and did that which was right in the sight of the Lord. And God directed him in all things¹. Unhappily prosperity made him proud, and he carried his audacity so far as to usurp the priestly office². One day, going into the Temple³, he went to burn incense upon the altar⁴. Eighty priests, with Azarias, the High Priest, at their head, opposed the king, and prevented him from burning incense.

Ozias, being very angry, threatened to strike the priests with the censer which he held in his hand. No sooner had he raised his hand than he himself was stricken with leprosy⁵,

which appeared on his forehead before all the priests. And they, seized with horror at this sudden and awful punishment, took hold of the king and put him out of the Temple.

The king was terrified, and, feeling the leprosy spread all over his body, hastened away from the Temple to shut himself up in a palace apart from all others. He remained a leper till the day of his death. Such was the fearful punishment which God inflicted on an otherwise faithful king, because of his sacrilegious attempt to perform an office that belonged only to priests.

¹ He overcame the enemies of Juda, and brought his kingdom to a state of great prosperity. — ² He wished to be both priest and king as the heathens were; and to be, therefore, not only the temporal head, but also the spiritual head of his people. — ³ into the Sanctuary, which, according to the Law, only the priests might enter. — ⁴ See Chapt. XXXVIII. — ⁵ On account of the contagion, the king had till his death to live in a house apart, and might not even enter the outer court of the Temple. The throne passed to his son, Joatham.

II. Commentary.

After pride comes a fall. The case of Ozias, like that of Saul, shows us that it is easy for a man to be made proud by prosperity, power or riches. To be king, no longer satisfied him; he must be priest as well! This led him to sin grievously against the law of God, and as a punishment for his pride he lost even his royal position, and led a sad and solitary life. No doubt, in his solitude, he renounced his pride, and heartily repented of his crime. "Every one that exalteth himself shall be humbled" (Luke 14, 11).

Temporal and spiritual authority. Even in the Old Testament, God, in His wisdom, separated the spiritual or priestly, from the temporal or royal authority, perpetuating it in Aaron and his descendants. In the New Testament our Lord instituted a special priesthood, entrusting its authority to the apostles and their successors. Both Church and State represent God's authority, and they ought mutually to respect each other, and work together for the good of the people, but neither of them ought to usurp the prerogatives of the other. The severe punishment which followed the crime of Ozias ought to serve as a warning to temporal rulers in all ages not to

encroach on the rights of the Church; and it ought to show all men that it is a sin not to respect the spiritual authority instituted by God, to set themselves up against it, or blame or abuse its decrees.

Lawful obedience. The High Priest did his duty in undauntedly opposing the king in his sinful purpose. This was a case when it would have been wrong for him to obey the king, for he commanded a thing which God had forbidden.

III. Application.

Remind yourselves of the cases in which you are not bound to obey your parents and those set in authority over you.

CHAPTER LXXII.

THE PROPHECIES OF ISAIAS. (700 B. C.)

I. Narrative and Explanation.

DURING the reign of the same Ozias, the people of Juda were guilty of many acts of idolatry. Wherefore God sent them the great prophet Isaias¹. In sublime and terrific language he warned them of many fearful calamities that were to come upon their country².

¹ He lived from about 750 to 700 B. C. He was the chief among the prophets of that time, being remarkable not only for what he did, but still more on account of his wonderful prophecies. Holy Scripture itself calls him "the great prophet, faithful in the sight of God" (Ecclus. 48, 25). — ² and preached penance. "Hear the word of the Lord," he wrote: "Wash yourselves, be clean, take away the evil of your devices from my eyes; cease to do perversely. Learn to do well: seek judgment. Then come and accuse me, saith the Lord. If your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow: if they be red as crimson, they shall be as white as wool. But if you will provoke me to wrath, the sword shall devour you." The Lord thus reminds the inhabitants of Juda that they were not only to worship Him outwardly, but to serve Him by thought, word and deed. If they were converted, He would take away their sins, however grievous or numerous they might be.

The Lord also revealed to this prophet so many particulars relating to the Saviour of the world that, reading his prophecies, one would suppose Isaias had lived at the same time as our Divine Lord, instead of living seven hundred

years before³. A few of these prophecies will show how clearly this greatest of all the prophets foresaw the Birth, Passion and Death of the Redeemer.

Speaking of the Mother of the Messias, as well as of the Messias Himself, he said: "Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and His name shall be called Emmanuel, that is, God with us. And There shall come forth a rod out of the root of Jesse, and a flower shall rise up out of his root. And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and of fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and of godliness. And He shall be filled with the spirit of the fear of the Lord.

"A Child is born to us, a Son is given to us, and the government is upon His shoulder. His name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, the Father of the world to come, the Prince of Peace. God Himself will come and save you; then⁴ shall the eyes of the blind be opened and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped."

³ Isaias described much of our Lord's Life as accurately as if he had been one of the evangelists, who wrote and described what they had themselves seen. Only a few among the many prophecies of Isaias are quoted above. — ⁴ that is, when the Redeemer shall have come.

Concerning the Passion of our Lord he prophesied: "There is no beauty in Him, nor comeliness⁵. Despised, and the most abject of men, a man of sorrows⁶. He has borne our infirmities; He was wounded for our iniquities; He was bruised for our sins, and by His bruises we are healed⁷. The Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was offered because it was His own will, and He opened not His mouth⁸. He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearer."⁹ Regarding His future glory, the prophet says: "The gentiles shall beseech Him, and His sepulchre shall be glorious." Isaias prophesied about fifty years. It is said that he, while yet alive, was sawn in two by order of the impious king Manasses.

⁵ i. e. He, the Redeemer, is quite disfigured and marred by the treatment He had received. — ⁶ A man full of suffering—only there for the purpose of suffering. — ⁷ His wounds obtain for us salvation,

namely pardon and grace. — ⁸ to complain. — ⁹ He suffered, full of resignation, and was, as it were, as dumb as a patient lamb.

II. Commentary.

The Omniscience of God. God sees the future as if it were actually present, and He revealed the life of the Redeemer so clearly to Isaias, that the prophet was able to describe it as if he had seen it in person.

The Holiness of God. He loves only that which is good, and detests evil. He wishes man to be good in thought, word and deed. "Wash yourselves, be clean, take away the evil of your devices from my eyes; cease to do perversely."

The Mercy of God. He is quite ready to pardon if only the sinner will be converted. "Then (when you are converted), come and accuse me. If your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow &c."

True conversion consists, as the words of Isaias show, in a complete change of heart and life. The sinner must renounce all bad thoughts and sinful deeds, and must do what is right. He must hate the sins which he has hitherto loved, and must worship the God Whom he has hitherto despised and offended.

Even the most grievous sins can be remitted if only the sinner be truly penitent. "If your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow; and if they be red as crimson, they shall be as white as wool." Therefore, not even the greatest of sinners should despair of God's mercy. If he does, he sins against the Holy Ghost, and is in danger of being lost eternally.

The testimony of the prophets helps and confirms our faith. The prophecies of Isaias and the other prophets were written by the inspiration of God, and have to this day been preserved in the Holy Scriptures in order to strengthen our faith. Our Saviour says: "Search the Scriptures, the same are they that give testimony of me" (John 5, 39). It must, indeed, confirm our faith to see that the very things which the Church teaches us about the Person and Life of the Redeemer, were foretold by the prophets hundreds of years before His Birth.

The prophecies of Isaias constitute *the ninth promise of the Messias*, and contain the following important doctrines of faith:

a) That the Redeemer is God; for Isaias writes: "God Himself will come and will save you," and he calls Him "Emmanuel, or God with us". Jesus Christ is indeed the true God with us, for He is the Son of God, made Man.

b) That the Divine Redeemer would be conceived and born of a virgin: "Conceived of the Holy Ghost, born of the Virgin Mary".

c) That He would suffer sorrow and pain, that He would be wounded, sacrificed and slain (New Test. LXXII).

d) That He would, like unto a lamb, suffer and die patiently and willingly. "He was offered because it was His own will, and He opened not His mouth. He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearer."

e) Isaias foretells in plain words that it was on account of the sins of men that the Redeemer would suffer and die, in order to win pardon and salvation for them. Thus he teaches the vicarious satisfaction made by the Redeemer of the world.

f) Finally, the prophet glances at the glory of the Divine Saviour, saying that His sepulchre would be glorious, and that the nations (Jews and gentiles) would adore Him. The grave of our Lord was made glorious by His Resurrection; and the nations could not adore Him, were He not still in heaven, our God and Mediator. Thus the prophecy foretells that, as Saviour of His people, He would rise from the dead, and sit on His throne in heaven: "He rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven, and sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty."

Isaias was a great saint of the Old Testament. He is venerated by the Church as a great preacher of penance, zealous for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, and, also, as a highly inspired prophet and martyr. When you recite the Litany of the Saints, and say, "All ye holy patriarchs and prophets, pray for us," you can think especially of God's holy prophet, Isaias.

II. Commentary.

Is your piety only exterior? Does the holy fear of God reign within you? Do you love God with all your heart, and detest sin? Do you ever allow envious, malicious, revengeful, impure, or proud thoughts to enter your mind? Have you tried to amend your life since your last confession?

CHAPTER LXXIII.

THE PIOUS KING EZECHIAS (723—694 B. C.).

I. Narrative and Explanation.

DURING the reign of Achaz the people of Juda were visited with a terrible calamity. That unhappy king had sacrificed his own children to the idol Moloch, one of the chief gods of the gentiles. He had closed the gates of the Temple, and broken the sacred vessels. The Lord, therefore, delivered him into the hands of the king of Syria, who slew in one day a hundred and twenty thousand men of Juda, while two hundred thousand women and children were carried into captivity.

Achaz having died a short time after, his son Ezechias¹ ascended the throne. This pious prince immediately cast down the altars which his unhappy father had everywhere raised to the pagan gods; he threw open again the gates of the Temple, and exhorted the Levites to purify it from the profanations that had taken place there; saying that it was because of the sins of the people, and, above all, because of their idolatry, that so many misfortunes had come upon them.

And God blessed Ezechias and was with him in all he did; so that in his days the kingdom of Juda regained all its former prosperity. Nevertheless it came to pass that after some years, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, came with a mighty army, and besieged Jerusalem.

Then Ezechias went to the Temple and prayed. He also sent priests, clothed in sackcloth, to the prophet Isaias, to ask him to intercede with God in behalf of him and his people. The prophet sent word to Ezechias not to fear,

for that God had heard his prayer, and would destroy the Assyrians, and that their king, returning to his own country, should perish by the sword.

That same night the angel of the Lord went to the camp of the Assyrians, and killed one hundred and eighty-five thousand warriors². Thus Sennacherib was obliged to return with disgrace to his own country. There he went to the temple of his god, and his own sons slew him with the sword. Thus was fulfilled the prophecy of Isaias. Ezechias, some time after, fell sick and lay at the point of death. The prophet Isaias was sent to tell him to put his house in order, for that he must die. The king terrified at the thought of death, turned his face towards the Temple, and prayed with tears that God might prolong his life. God heard his prayer, and sent the prophet again to tell him that fifteen years should be added to his life. And so it came to pass; and at the end of the fifteen years he died, after a happy and prosperous reign, the reward of his fidelity to God.

¹ Ezechias was grandfather to Ozias. — ² with, most likely, a malady, or pestilence, which caused a speedy death.

II. Commentary.

The Justice of God. The holy king, Ezechias, was blessed by God, and saved from a great danger in the most wonderful way. On the other hand, the pride of Ozias was punished by a life-long illness; and all the other kings of Juda who were unfaithful to God, were punished by Him in different ways.

In the hour of danger we ought to do as the pious king Ezechias did. He took every possible human precaution to defend Jerusalem, and then, full of confidence, humbly asked God's protection. In the hour of need we in the same way ought to do all we can ourselves, though we must not depend on our own efforts for success, but humbly pray to God for help and deliverance. "Our help cometh from the Lord!"

The power of prayer. The marvellous help which was sent to Ezechias ought to prove to us the power and efficacy of fervent prayer.

III. Application.

Have you always prayed with confidence? Very likely you have prayed for many things, and have not received them because you lacked confidence. Have more faith, for the future, when you pray, especially in times of trouble and spiritual need; and then you will certainly be heard.

CHAPTER LXXIV.

JUDITH.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

AFTER a brief season of repentance and of penance, the people of Juda again forgot the Lord. Then God, in His anger, sent them a new and terrible punishment, which would have ended in the total destruction of their nation¹, were it not for the heroic courage of a certain holy woman. At that time Holofernes, general-in-chief of the Assyrian forces, came at the head of a mighty army² to overthrow the kingdom of Juda, as he had overthrown many other kingdoms.

Having taken all the cities and strongholds of the country, and treated their inhabitants with savage cruelty, he came to lay siege to Bethulia³. He cut off the aqueducts which supplied the city with water, and thereby reduced the citizens to such an extremity that the elders resolved to give up the city in five days, unless they were relieved before that time⁴. Meanwhile they prayed fervently to God, humbled themselves before Him, and strewed ashes on their heads.

Now there was in the city a woman named Judith, of rare beauty and of great wealth, who, being a widow, lived retired in her own house, and spent her days in prayer and good works⁵. Being touched with compassion for the sad condition of her people, she presented herself before the ancients of the city and said: "What is this word by which you have consented to give up the city within five days? You have set a time for the mercy of the Lord according to your pleasure. This is not a word that may draw down mercy, but rather indignation. Let us therefore be penitent

for this same thing, and remember that all the saints were tempted and remained faithful; but that those who rejected the trials of the Lord were destroyed. And let us believe that these scourges have happened for our amendment and not for our destruction.”

¹ This was about the year 690, during the minority of Manasses. — ² of 120,000 men on foot, and 22,000 horsemen. — ³ This was a mountain fortress on the northern side of Mount Gelboe, in which the brook Kishon takes its rise, and to the south of Naim. — ⁴ The army of Holofernes was quite twenty times as strong as that of Bethulia, and, humanly speaking, there was no salvation to be looked for, especially after he had turned off the water-supply. The Assyrian general did not attempt to storm Bethulia, for he reckoned confidently that the people of the town, dying of thirst, would very soon surrender; and he quietly awaited the result of the want of water. — ⁵ and fasting; Judith only took one meal a day, and that one in the evening.

The ancients, inspired by these noble words, begged her to pray for the people. She consented, and retiring to her oratory, clothed herself in hair-cloth⁶, put ashes on her head, and falling prostrate before the Lord⁷, she besought Him to humble the enemies of her nation. While she thus prayed, Almighty God inspired her with the thought that she should go into the camp of the enemy and cut off the head of the Assyrian general Holofernes.

Then, putting off the hair-cloth, she immediately arrayed herself in her richest garments, perfumed herself with the best ointments, plaited her hair, and adorned herself with bracelets, earlets, and rings. And the Lord increased her beauty, because all her dressing up did not proceed from vanity. Then she took a servant maid with her and set out for the camp of Holofernes.

Being brought before Holofernes, the tyrant was charmed with her majestic beauty, and supposing that she had fled from her own people, ordered her to receive every attention, and to be allowed to go and come as she pleased. On the fourth day Holofernes gave a grand banquet to the officers of his army. He and they overcharged themselves with wine, and when they lay down on their couches, they fell

into a death-like sleep. Then Judith resolved to strike the decisive blow that was to save her country and her people.

She besought God, saying: "Strengthen me, O Lord God of Israel, and in this hour look upon the works of my hands, that I may bring to pass that which I have purposed, having a belief that it might be done by Thee." Then she moved softly towards the tent of Holofernes. And taking his sword which hung from a pillar near by, she drew it from its scabbard, raised it aloft, and, at the second stroke, cut off the head of the sleeping tyrant. She then gave the head to her maid, who waited without, and bade her put it into her wallet ⁸.

⁶ A rough garment worn under the other clothes, for the purpose of tormenting the body. — ⁷ praying for help and light. — ⁸ in which she had brought food from Bethulia.

Departing from the camp, she returned with her servant to Bethulia, and having assembled the people, showed them the head of Holofernes, saying: "Praise ye the Lord our God, Who hath killed the enemy of His people by my hand. His angel hath been my keeper and hath brought me back to you." Then Ozias, the prince of the people of Israel ⁹, said to her: "Blessed art thou, O daughter of the Lord, the Most High God, above all the women upon the earth." Then the people, praising God, rushed towards the camp of the Assyrians. The guards, terrified and confused, made a great noise at the door of their general's tent in order to awaken him.

But finding their efforts useless they at length ventured to enter the tent, and seeing the headless body of their mighty general weltering in blood, they were seized with fear and fled in haste, crying out that Holofernes was slain ¹⁰. A great confusion ensued, and the people of Bethulia had only to complete the work commenced by Judith, and take possession of the Assyrian camp with its rich spoils.

Then the Jewish people, turning to Judith, sang with one accord: "Thou art the glory of Jerusalem; thou art the joy of Israel; thou art the honour of our people." The rejoicings following on this splendid victory were kept up for three



months. And Judith became great throughout all Israel¹¹. She died at an advanced age¹², and was mourned by all the people.

Judith is, in some degree, a figure of Mary, the Immaculate Virgin. Mary is the true heroine of Israel, and of mankind. Judith was praised by the people of one city as the pride and ornament of Jerusalem. Mary is praised throughout the whole world as the glory of her people, the cooperatrix in the redemption of the whole human race, the woman whose seed conquered death and hell, as the Almighty Himself foretold to Adam and Eve after their fall.

⁹ The chief man of the town. — ¹⁰ Many were killed in their flight, and the whole camp was plundered by the people of Bethulia. What joy and gratitude to God must they have felt at being delivered from so great a danger! — ¹¹ She returned to her former retired and penitential mode of life. — ¹² at the age of a hundred and five years.

II. Commentary.

The Goodness of God to His people. The attack of the powerful Holofernes reduced the kingdom of Juda to a state of the greatest danger. He had already taken several places, and if the strong fortress of Bethulia had fallen, the way to Jerusalem itself would have been open to him. The

Temple would then have been destroyed, and the whole country conquered. Humanly speaking all this must have happened, for Bethulia was suffering from want of water and could not hold out beyond a few days. But once more God spared the faithless kingdom of Juda; and brought to nought the plots of the wicked Holofernes, through the instrumentality of a weak woman. God put it into the heart of Judith to slay the enemy of her people, and enlightened and strengthened her to carry out her dangerous undertaking. He, moreover, produced such a panic in the Assyrian army and its leaders, after the death of their general, that they completely lost their heads, abandoned their camp in their confusion, and took to flight before a mere handful of Bethulians. In this instance, as in that of Goliath, God chose the weak things of the world to confound the strong (1 Cor. 1, 27).

Resignation to God's will. The people of Bethulia believed in the true God, and had not been led away to serve idols (Judith 8, 18), but, still, their faith was not sufficiently enlightened, and their wills not sufficiently resigned. They "tempted" God, or dictated to Him, by saying: "If Thou wilt help, help soon; if Thy help does not come in five days, we shall despair of Thine assistance and surrender." Judith was right to blame them, for it is not for us, blind, wretched men to dictate to the great God as to when and how He shall help us. Probably the Bethulians expected that by sending rain He would put an end to the want of water; but God had decided on saving them in another way, for His thoughts are not our thoughts. Let us guard against dictating to God as to what way He is to help us. We must leave the time and mode of help entirely to Him.

The virtues of Judith. She was a very virtuous, nay, more, a very holy woman. Let us see what virtues she especially displayed in this story.

a) *Piety.* She prayed often and devoutly. By constant communion with God she learnt to know Him, and obtained great confidence in Him. It was in prayer that her great thoughts and resolutions came to her, as also the wisdom to carry them out.

b) *Mortification and self-denial.* Her husband left her great riches, many servants, and flocks and herds. But although she had such great possessions, and might have led a luxurious and brilliant life, she lived quite retired from the world, in a state of voluntary poverty and chastity, and practised severe penances, wearing hair-cloth, and fasting every day. "Blessed are the poor in spirit!" It was by this life of mortification that Judith attained to the

c) *Heroism*, which enabled her to save her people. The more we deny ourselves and resist our natural desires, the more holy and strong will be our wills, and the less shall we shrink from any burden or danger which could advance God's glory and the good of our neighbour. The High-Priest was right when he said to Judith: "Thou hast done manfully, because thou hast loved chastity" (Judith 15, 11).

d) *Love of her country.* Judith knew that the Temple and her country were in extreme danger, and it was to save them that she went unprotected into the enemy's camp, and placed herself in what was, apparently, imminent danger of death. She was willing to sacrifice herself for them, out of love for God and His holy Law.

e) Her *humility* is especially worthy of admiration. She was proud neither of beauty nor riches, and was truly humble of heart. "Let us be penitent, and humble our souls before God," said she to the elders. After her heroic action she gave all the glory to God. "Praise ye the Lord our God," said she, "Who hath killed the enemies of His people by my hand".

Judith is considered by the Church to be a *type of the Blessed Virgin Mary*. Even as the chaste Judith cut off the head of Holofernes, thereby saving her people from captivity and slavery, so did Mary, the Immaculate Mother, through her Divine Son, trample on the head of the infernal Holofernes, and free all mankind from his power. Even as Judith was lauded as "blessed above all women on earth", so did St. Elizabeth and the angel Gabriel both say to our Lady: "Blessed art thou among women." Judith gave all the glory to God, as did Mary in the Magnificat (New Test. IV).

Judith was devout: Mary is the vessel of singular devotion. Judith was a holy woman: Mary is the Virgin Most Holy, and the Mirror of justice in which all virtues are reflected. Judith was heroic: Mary was the most heroic of women, and the Queen of martyrs. Judith was the glory of Jerusalem: Mary is the Queen of all saints, the glory of the heavenly Jerusalem, the joy of the elect, and the honour of the whole Church.

The invocation of the Saints. The people of Bethulia recommended themselves to the intercession of Judith, because she was a holy woman, and because, therefore, her prayers would have great power with God. It is for the same reason that we recommend ourselves to the intercession of the saints.

Belief in guardian angels. "God's angel hath been my keeper", said Judith; and her words show us that she believed that she had a guardian angel. The Catholic doctrine about guardian angels is thoroughly founded on Holy Scripture.

III. Application.

Do you always give glory to God, or do you cherish vain thoughts, and boast of your own attainments? Are you fond of talking about yourself? Do you try to depreciate others in order to exalt yourself? Renounce pride! Be ashamed of your silly vanity and boasting! Each day direct all your intentions to the greater glory of God, for this is an excellent way to put down pride and to obtain merit in the sight of God.

THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

(606—536 B. C.).

CHAPTER LXXV.

THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY—FALL OF THE KINGDOM OF JUDA (588 B. C.).

I. Narrative and Explanation.

AT last the people of Juda became so hardened in sin that the divine chastisements had no longer any effect upon their hearts. They gave themselves wholly up to the

vile practices of idolatry, and persecuted the prophets of God, several of whom they put to death. In vain did the great prophet, Jeremias, who lived at that time, endeavour to recall them to repentance¹. Finally, the patience of the merciful God was exhausted, and the ruin so often foretold by the prophet Isaias fell heavily on the people.

In the year 606 B. C., Nabuchodonozor², king of Babylon, placed himself at the head of an immense army, marched against Jerusalem³, and, having taken it, carried away the king and the principal inhabitants⁴ as captives. Sixteen years later, those who were left in Jerusalem revolted against Nabuchodonozor, and the latter returned with a still greater army, and after a siege of eighteen months, he took Jerusalem by storm.

Then the whole city was given up to fire and pillage⁵. The Temple itself was consumed by fire, and the sacred vessels were carried off. All the people that escaped the sword were led into captivity in Babylon⁶, and the splendid city of Jerusalem was reduced to a heap of ruins.

¹ He tried to convert the people, and avert the threatened punishment, by his own penances. He put on himself an iron yoke (i. e. the strong bar which fastens two oxen together) and thus preached penance to the people. He did this in order to bring home to them into how degrading a servitude they had fallen. But they scourged him and threw him into a dungeon, from which he was delivered by Nabuchodonozor when he conquered Jerusalem. — ² He and his father had, about 610 B. C., destroyed the Assyrian empire (to which Babylon belonged), overthrown Ninive, and set up a new Babylonian empire, and subjected half Asia. — ³ because the Jews had revolted. He laid siege to Jerusalem until (596 B. C.) it surrendered unconditionally. — ⁴ 10,000 men. — ⁵ The famine during this siege was so terrible that mothers cooked and ate their children who had perished from starvation. A pestilence, moreover, broke out and swept off many of the inhabitants. When, at last, the city was stormed, thousands were killed, and the town literally ran with blood. After Jerusalem was taken, it was sacked, the beautiful Temple destroyed, the houses burnt, and the walls overthrown. — ⁶ Only the very poor were left behind to cultivate the fields and vineyards. The king, Sedecias, was carried off, his eyes were put out, and he was kept in prison till he died.

Jeremias remained in Jerusalem⁷, and, sitting on the ruins of the desolate city, he lamented in the most pathetic manner

the miseries of his people, and the destruction of Jerusalem. "How doth the city sit solitary that was full of people; how is the mistress of nations become as a widow⁸; the princess of provinces made tributary?⁹ The ways of Sion¹⁰ mourn, because there are none that come to the solemn feast. O all ye that pass by the way, attend, and see if there be any sorrow like to my sorrow¹¹. To what shall I compare thee, or to what shall I liken thee? Great as the sea is thy destruction. Who shall heal thee? Convert us, O Lord, to Thee, and we shall be converted¹²; renew our days, as from the beginning."¹³

Jeremias, however, was not without consolation. He knew¹⁴ that Israel would be restored, and that God would make a new covenant with His people. "The days shall come, saith the Lord, and I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel¹⁵ and with the house of Juda. Not according to the covenants which I made with their fathers, which they made void. But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days. I will give my law and will write it on their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more."¹⁶

⁷ He was given the choice of either remaining in Juda, or of filling an honourable post in Babylon. He chose to remain among the ruins of the Temple to comfort the Jews who were left behind. — ⁸ Jerusalem, formerly the mistress of many nations, now robbed of her king and her inhabitants. — ⁹ subject to Babylon, and forced to pay tribute to her. — ¹⁰ the road to Sion, formerly thronged with pilgrims. — ¹¹ This is supposed to be spoken by Jerusalem. — ¹² We have sinned, therefore we are punished. We cannot be converted of ourselves: convert us, and then our conversion will be sincere. — ¹³ Bring back the former happy days. — ¹⁴ and foretold that the Jews would return after a captivity of seventy years (Chapt. LXXX). — ¹⁵ with the descendants of the former people of Israel. — ¹⁶ This new covenant will be an inward covenant of grace.

The captive Jews¹⁷ were treated with kindness by the king of Babylon, but they longed for the land of their fathers and for the city of Jerusalem. This longing of their hearts is beautifully expressed in one of the Psalms: "Upon the rivers of Babylon, there we sat and wept, when we remem-

bered Sion. On the willows¹⁸ in the midst thereof we hung up our instruments¹⁹, for there they that led us into captivity required of us the words of songs²⁰. How shall we sing the song of the Lord in a strange land?²¹ If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand be forgotten²². Let my tongue cleave to my jaws²³ if I do not remember thee, if I make not Jerusalem the beginning of my joys.”²⁴

¹⁷ As also the scattered Israelites who from this time were usually termed Jews. — ¹⁸ the species known as weeping willow. — ¹⁹ as a sign of grief, for it was impossible for them to make music, or sing joyful songs. — ²⁰ or songs of joy. These were sung to the accompaniment of music, which was not the case with songs of mourning. — ²¹ They regarded it as an act of desecration to sing divine canticles in a heathen land, for the entertainment of their captors. — ²² Let my right hand forget its use, and refuse to serve me. — ²³ Let me be dumb. — ²⁴ if I prefer anything to the holy city.

During the captivity God did not abandon His people, but sent the prophet Ezechiel who admonished and instructed them. He also consoled them by telling them of a vision²⁵ which foreshadowed the deliverance of the people from their captivity. The spirit of the Lord brought Ezechiel to a plain filled with bones²⁶. Being told by God, he commanded the bones to come together, which was done, and they were covered with flesh and skin, but there was no spirit in them. And the Lord told Ezechiel to say to the spirit: “Come, spirit, and let them live again.” The spirit entered into them, and they lived; they stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army. Then the Lord said: “These bones are the house of Israel; they say that our bones are dried up²⁷ and our hope is lost, but say to them: Thus saith the Lord God: Behold, I will open your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel, and you shall know that I am the Lord, O my people.”

²⁵ Which God had permitted him to have. — ²⁶ bones of dead men. — ²⁷ The Jews, in their banishment, considered themselves to be like unto those who are dead and buried.

Amongst the captives were several young men of high rank, belonging to the first families. The king ordered the most distinguished of these to be brought to his own palace²⁸,

clothed in kingly apparel, and fed with meats from his own table. Amongst these young men were Daniel ²⁹, Ananias, Misael and Azarias.

They resolved not to eat the meats from the king's table, because the Jewish law forbade the use of certain meats ³⁰, and they begged the chief steward to allow them to eat only vegetables, and to drink only water. The steward was disposed to comply with their request, but he told them that if they lived on such diet, they would become so lean that the king would blame him, and perhaps punish him severely.

Daniel besought the steward to try them for ten days with the food and drink they desired to have. The steward consented, and at the end of ten days the faces of these young men were fresher and more comely than those of the other young men of the court.

After this the steward gave them only vegetables and water; but God gave them ³¹ wisdom and science ³². When the time came that they were presented to the king, he was so charmed with their beauty and wisdom that he retained them in his service.

The new covenant which Jeremias foretells is the Christian religion, in which greater grace is given to men; for which reason it is called the law of grace, while the Old Testament was called the law of fear.

²⁸ To be educated to fill places about the court. They were therefore instructed in the language, writings and sciences of the Babylonians or Chaldees. — ²⁹ who was then about fourteen years old. — ³⁰ such as the flesh of unclean beasts, blood, and flesh full of blood. Moreover, certain portions of the flesh of oxen, sheep and goats, as well as wine, were offered to idols, and after they had been thus offered were sold in the markets, so that the Jews could never be sure that when eating at pagan tables, some food might not be placed before them which it was unlawful for them to eat. In order to be on the safe side, Daniel and his companions wished to refrain from all the flesh and wine sent to them by the king. — ³¹ as a reward for their conscientiousness and self-restraint. — ³² God gave them an extraordinary and supernatural understanding and wisdom, so that they not only excelled the other youths, but even the wise men of the kingdom (Dan. 1, 20). To Daniel God gave the gifts of prophecy and interpretation of dreams.

II. Commentary.

The Long-suffering, Justice and Faithfulness of God. He was very patient and long-suffering with Juda. Up to the very moment of its overthrow He held out, through Jeremias, hope of pardon and the averting of punishment, if only the people would be converted. And was not the fate of the kingdom of Israel of itself an impressive warning? However, neither king nor people would give heed to this, or to the warnings of the prophets sent by God, but listened, rather, to false prophets, resisted grace, and persisted in their impenitence. At last the measure of their sins was full, the justice of God manifested itself, and the long threatened punishment overtook Juda.

The Goodness and Mercy of God. The Lord did not leave His miserable people without comfort, but gave them through Jeremias the assurance that He had not finally rejected them, but would restore them to His favour, and institute a new and higher covenant with them.

The uses of suffering. Their captivity served for the salvation of many of the Jews. They turned to God with their whole hearts, for they felt that all their hopes of liberty rested in Him. At last they abhorred idolatry, and were so completely cured of their inclination towards it, that they never relapsed into it, even after their return to the Promised Land.

The love of Jeremias for his people. Even though he was misunderstood and persecuted by them, he felt no malicious satisfaction when the judgment foretold by him really overtook them. No, he bewailed the hard fate of his people, and gave utterance to the deep grief of his noble soul in the "Lamentations".

The necessity of grace. This is taught by the words: "Convert us to Thee, O Lord, and we shall be converted." The sinner cannot be converted without the assistance of grace.—In their captivity the Jews acknowledged themselves to be religiously and politically dead, and had no hope of ending their banishment by their own efforts, or of returning to their country and becoming once more an independent

nation: "Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost." It was only by God's Spirit that the dead and captive people could be raised to a new political and religious existence; and only by the help of God that they could be freed and restored to their own country. This applies to nations and individuals of all ages. A fallen nation can be restored and renewed only by religion and the Spirit of God. And no individual who has succumbed to the death of sin, can raise himself up by his own strength, but only by the help of God, Who by His grace can restore a dead soul to life. "I will forgive their iniquity and I will remember their sin no more."

The tenth promise of the Messias. The New Covenant foretold by Jeremias was instituted by our Lord, Jesus Christ. The Old Covenant was an external law, written on stone tables, observed out of fear, and which could effect no inner justification or sanctification. The law of the New Covenant was written in men's hearts by the Holy Ghost, so that it is a law kept out of love, and which changes man inwardly, cleanses and heals him from sin. For this reason the Holy Ghost came down on Whitsunday, and wrote the law of Christ on the hearts of the apostles, illuminating them, and kindling in them the fire of love. The law of the New Covenant is engraved in the hearts of individuals in holy Baptism.

The Lamentations of Jeremias are very impressive, and full of deep meaning. They refer literally to the destruction of Jerusalem, and the captivity which the Jewish people had brought upon themselves; but they bear, (as the Church has always taught) a deeper meaning, and contain allusions both to the sufferings of the Divine Redeemer, and to the sad condition of man when he is separated from God.

1. The Church applies the passages: "O all ye that pass by the way, attend and see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow", and "Great as the sea is thy destruction. Who shall heal thee?" to our Lord, suffering and dying, and also to His sorrowful Mother (see the Lamentations sung in the office of the last three days of Holy Week).

2. The passages relating to the desolation of Jerusalem and the Temple are applied by the Church to the sad condition to which man is brought by sin and its consequences, and to the desolation which

mortal sin entails on the individual, whose soul is the temple of God. Of a soul which is in a state of mortal sin, we can truly say: "O how desolate is that soul, which was formerly so rich in virtues and merits. She was the mistress over the powers of human nature, and now, behold, she is the slave of sin and Satan! Once she was beautiful, now she is defaced, and full of sorrow, unrest, and remorse of conscience."

Comfort in suffering. Almighty God did not quite forsake His people. Even during their captivity he raised up prophets among them, to urge them to do penance, to strengthen their faith, to warn them against idolatry, to comfort them and give them hope both of deliverance from their present captivity, and of the coming of a future Saviour. We too, in our troubles and adversity, ought to draw comfort from the thought of our Divine Saviour, Who endured unspeakable sufferings for our sake. We should also draw comfort and courage from the thoughts of eternal life. St. Paul writes: "The sufferings of this world are not worthy to be compared with the glory to come, that shall be revealed in us" (Rom. 8, 18).

The eleventh promise of the Messias. The vision of Ezechiel is, primarily, prophetic of the resurrection of the body, in which all the Jews believed, even as patient Job believed in it. Thus the vision presupposes and describes this belief, and then employs it to convey further teaching. By it God wished to say thus to the Jews: "You are now dispersed, and, as it were, dead; but I, your God, will not forsake you, I will gather you together again, and take you back to your own country." This promise was immediately and literally fulfilled by the return of the Jews from captivity (Chapt. LXXX), by which they became once more a nation; but it was more perfectly and gloriously fulfilled by the New Covenant by which God poured out His Holy Spirit on all nations, and raised up a greater and more perfect Israel.

Longing for home. The Jews loved their country, their Temple and their worship, so that even though they experienced no want in Babylon, they pined to return to their own home. The more pious among them longed to celebrate once more the feasts of the Lord, to offer sacrifice and sing canticles of praise. We too are living in

banishment "in this vale of tears"; for heaven is our one, eternal home. We ought to pine for the heavenly Jerusalem, and do all we can to deserve admittance thereto.

Conscientiousness. Daniel and his three companions offer us a noble example of conscientious fidelity in the observance of God's laws. The inducement to partake of the meats and wine sent from the king's table was very great; but the four youths practised self-denial, and contented themselves with the poorest and most simple of fares, rather than expose themselves to the danger of sin. They acted thus, because they were possessed by the holy fear of God, and dreaded anything that might offend Him.

Fortitude and temperance. They, furthermore, offer us a noble example of fortitude. Their temptations to unbelief and sin in the luxurious court of the pagan king were numerous and powerful, but Daniel and his companions remained firm in faith and in the observance of the divine law. They practised the greatest abstemiousness, and did not let themselves be led away by the example of the other youths in the palace who did partake of the king's dishes. Ought this not to put those Christians to shame who have not the courage to confess their faith before those who are unbelievers or non-Catholics, and who have not even the fortitude or self-denial to abstain from meat on Fridays! Does this not show great weakness, cowardice, and want of character!

The fruits of temperance. The abstemiousness practised by the four youths had a good effect on their bodies as well as their souls. These boys who were content with simple fare, and who did not taste wine, were more healthy, fresh and comely than those who ate and drank from the king's table. Moderation in eating and drinking preserves health, while the contrary course spoils it and leads to many diseases. "By surfeiting many have perished, but he that is temperate shall prolong life" (Ecclus. 37, 34). A man should eat to live, and not live to eat. The minds of these youths were also strengthened by their abstemiousness. They learnt with ease, and made great progress in knowledge.

They knew how to govern themselves and advanced in every virtue. Moreover, by reason of their temperance they received supernatural gifts from God, especially the gift of wisdom, and to Daniel was given that of prophecy. Temperance, practised for love of God, is meritorious and wins many graces for us.

Good example. Daniel was especially favoured by God; and why? Because he showed a good example to his companions. Even as it is a terrible sin to lead others to do evil, so is it meritorious to show to others a good example, and lead them to do what is right.

The greatest of honours. It was a great honour for the four youths to be chosen by king Nabuchodonozor to be in his court; but it is a far greater honour to be chosen to be the servants of God; for God is the Most High, Who rewards His faithful servants with eternal glory and happiness.

Conscientiousness and fortitude win respect even from the unbelieving. We see this in the case of Daniel and his companions. Their faithful observance of their religion, and their abstemiousness clearly pleased the chief steward; otherwise he would not have agreed to their proposal. He had a greater respect for these four than for the other Jewish youths, who ate without demur of the heathen dishes. In their hearts even the vicious pay tribute to virtue.

III. Application.

Do you take to heart the admonitions and warnings of your parents and teachers, or do you, by preference, listen to bad companions? Do you follow the example of those who make no account of sin? Just think how terrible it is for a young heart to be hard and impenitent! If you have not amended your life since your last confession, begin at once. Make good resolutions every morning, and pray for grace to carry them out!

Think what terrible havoc mortal sin makes in the soul. Conceive a great horror of mortal sin, and resolve rather to die than commit one.

Does the Holy Ghost dwell within you; or, in other words, are you in a state of grace? Do not grieve the Holy Ghost Who is within you, by venial sin, and do not drive Him from you by mortal sin.

Had you been in Daniel's place, would you have acted as he did? Do you care more for good eating and drinking than for anything else? Are you, sometimes, discontented with the food which is set before you? Have you ever sinned by greediness? Are you fond of strong drinks? From henceforward practise abstemiousness. Choose the worst rather than the best of what is offered to you. Faithfully observe all the laws relating to abstinence.

CHAPTER LXXVI.

Gen. c. 13.

DANIEL SAVES SUSANNA.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

AMONG the captive Jews in Babylon¹ there was a man named Joakim, whose wife, Susanna, was very beautiful, and feared God. Now Joakim being very rich and influential, it happened that many of his countrymen resorted to his house. Among these were two of the ancients who had been appointed judges for that year². The two old men were considered by the people as wise and virtuous, but in reality they were very wicked.

Now the visitors that came to Joakim generally left at noon, and then Susanna would walk forth into the orchard near by to refresh herself in the shade.³ The two old men knew this, and one day they went into the orchard and hid themselves behind the trees. A little later Susanna came in and fastened the gate, believing herself alone. Then the wicked old men came forth from their hiding-place and tried to make her commit sin.⁴

Susanna was horrified at their proposal; but they said that if she did not consent to their wishes, they would publicly accuse her of a great crime.⁵ Then Susanna raised her beautiful eyes to heaven, sighed and said: "I am straitened on every side, for if I do this thing it is death to me⁶, and if I do it not I shall not escape your hands.⁷ But it is better for me to fall into your hands, without doing it, than to sin in the sight of the Lord."



She then cried out with a loud voice; but the elders cried out against her. One of them ran to the orchard-gate, and opened it, that the people might enter.

¹ This city had been made by Nabuchodonozor into the capital of his kingdom, and he had enlarged it to such an extent that it measured fifty-four miles in circumference, and was surrounded by an enormous wall, flanked by two hundred and fifty towers. — ² being esteemed by the people as righteous men. Nabuchodonozor had allowed the Jews to govern themselves and live in accordance with their own laws. The court of justice was held in the house of Joakim, on account of his position among the Jews. — ³ Large gardens and pleasure-grounds were attached to the houses of the luxurious city of Babylon. — ⁴ against chastity. — ⁵ exposing her to the danger of loss of life and honour. — ⁶ "If I commit this sin, it will mean death to my soul, by causing it to lose grace and eternal life." — ⁷ "If I do not commit it, you, by false witness, will give me over to death." Thus Susanna was in danger of death on both sides; but she did not even hesitate in her choice, saying that she would rather die innocent than commit sin.

Then he and his companion accused Susanna of a most wicked act. Next day, accompanied by her parents and children, and other relatives ⁸, Susanna was brought before

the tribunal of justice, where she was condemned and sentenced to death. But she, weeping, looked up to heaven, for her heart had confidence in God⁹.

And the Lord heard her prayer. As she was led out to death¹⁰, Daniel, inspired from above¹¹, exclaimed: "I am clean from the blood of this woman." Then all the people began to ask him: "What meaneth this word that thou hast spoken?" He told them to return to judgment, because the elders had borne false witness against Susanna. Then the people went back in haste. But Daniel ordered the two accusers to be brought in separately.

This being done, he said to the first that came: "O thou that art grown old in evil days, now are thy sins come out. Tell me, under what tree thou sawest them conversing together?" He said: "Under a mastic-tree"¹². Daniel replied: "Thou hast lied against thy own head."¹³ Then he sent him away, and had the other brought in, whom he asked: "Tell me, under what tree didst thou take them conversing together?" He answered: "Under a holm-tree". Daniel replied: "Thou hast lied against thy own head."

The people saw by the contrary statements of the old men that their testimony was false, and rising up against them, they put them both to death. Susanna was restored to her joyful husband and children, and they and all the people blessed God, Who always saves and protects those who place their hopes in Him. Whereupon Daniel became great in the sight of the people¹⁴.

⁸ They all wept, for they knew Susanna's piety and chastity, and held her to be innocent. — ⁹ and knew that He could save her if it were His holy will to do so. — ¹⁰ by stoning. — ¹¹ to know Susanna's innocence and to take the right means of bringing it to light. — ¹² This tree does not grow in Europe. It has a sweet smelling sap, from which incense is made. — ¹³ to your own ruin. — ¹⁴ He was honoured and respected, because the people recognised that God's Spirit dwelt within him.

II. Commentary.

sa *The Omnipresence of God.* The old sinners "perverted their own mind and turned away their eyes that they might not look into heaven, nor remember just judgments"

(Dan. 13, 9). They intentionally banished all thought of the ever present and most just God, and said to Susanna: "No one seeth us." But on the other hand the holy woman did remember Him, and said: "It is better for me to fall into your hands without sinning, than to sin in the sight of the Lord."

The Omniscience of the Eternal God. "O Eternal God,^{AA} Who knowest hidden things, Who knowest all things before they come to pass, Thou knowest that they have borne false witness against me." God knows everything that is hidden, what is past, and what is still to be. He revealed to Daniel that the two elders had borne false witness against Susanna; and it was the thought of God's omniscience that gave Susanna courage and comfort in her hour of peril.

The Justice of God. He brought to light the innocence of Susanna, and the guilt of her accusers, in the most wonderful manner, in order that she might be rewarded, and they, punished. God often manifests His justice in this way, even upon earth.

Fortitude. Susanna was a valiant woman, a very heroine of virtue. She preferred to die rather than sin. St. Chrysostom says of her: "Susanna stood as a lamb between two wolves." She was left alone between these two lions, with no one to help her but God alone. He looked down from heaven, and suffered the dispute to make clear both the chastity of Susanna, and the wickedness of the elders; so that she might become a glorious example to women of all times. Susanna endured a severe fight, more severe than that of Joseph. He, a man, contended with one woman; but Susanna, a weak woman, had to contend with two men, and was a spectacle to men and to angels. The slander against her fidelity to her marriage-vow, the fear of death, her condemnation by all the people, the abhorrence of her husband and relations, the tears of her servants, the grief of all her household, she foresaw all this, and yet nothing could shake her fortitude."

The way to preserve chastity. Susanna's example shows us how we ought to act when tempted to sin against holy

purity. She not only reminded herself of the Presence of the Just and Holy God, but she called loudly for help to drive away the two wicked tempters. Thus, if we were to find ourselves in a similar position, we ought to think of God and crave his help, and besides this (if we cannot flee, as Joseph did in the house of Putiphar), we should seek the help of others.

Consequences of want of chastity. The two elders committed sin upon sin. They coveted their neighbour's wife; they intentionally sought her out, and by threats tried to drive her to sin; they calumniated her to her maids; they bore false witness against her in the court of justice; and, finally, by their wicked lies, caused her to be condemned to death. The source of all these sins was want of chastity. They allowed impure desires to rise in their hearts, and these unresisted desires drove them to further sins. Their sin was all the more grievous, because both these men were judges, and therefore bound to give a good example, to protect virtue, and to punish vice and crime. See, then, what evil consequences follow on impure desires! They lead to many sins, to deadness of conscience, injustice, and even to murder.

The beauty of virtue. In the same way that we detest the hateful crime of the elders, we love Susanna for the beautiful and honourable virtues which she exhibited. Her body was beautiful, but her soul was a thousand times more so. She was chaste and faithful, because she feared God. She dreaded sin as the greatest of all evils, and preferred dishonour in the eyes of the world, and loss of life, to the committing of a grievous sin. She has therefore been praised and honoured for centuries as a model of holy fear, fortitude, fidelity and chastity. We can apply to her the words of the Holy Ghost: "O how beautiful is the chaste generation with glory: for the memory thereof is immortal: because it is known both with God and with men" (Wisd. 4, 1).

The prayer full of confidence offered up by Susanna was heard, and God made known her innocence.

To set prisoners free is a work of mercy. Daniel did this, for, by the inspiration of God, he obtained the liberty of

Susanna, who had been unjustly put in prison and condemned to death.

The shame of sinners at the Last Judgment. What shame and terror must those two old sinners have felt when their lies and wickedness were revealed before all the people, who had hitherto esteemed them to be just men! Such will be the experience of many Christians who have succeeded in hiding their secret sins and evil doings from men, when, at the Last Day, they find their hypocrisy unmasked before the eyes of the whole world, and they themselves covered with confusion and ignominy, and sentenced to everlasting death!

III. Application.

Is your holy fear of God strong enough to enable you to stand firm as Susanna did, in the midst of severe temptations? Do not suffer either flattery or threats to lead you into sin! Pray for the gift of holy fear.

Resist the beginnings of evil. Do not let any impure thought or dishonourable desire take hold of you. Recollect immediately the Presence of God, and commend yourself to the protection of the most pure Virgin.

CHAPTER LXXVII.

THE PROPHET DANIEL.—THE THREE YOUNG MEN IN THE FIERY FURNACE.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

NABUCHODONOSOR had a dream¹ which terrified him greatly.² He saw a large statue; the head was of gold, the breast and arms of silver, the belly and thighs of brass, the legs of iron, and the feet part iron and part clay³. Then he noticed a stone rolling from the mountain⁴, which struck the statue on the feet and shattered it; and behold, the stone became a great mountain and filled the whole earth. None of the wise men⁵ could interpret the dream⁶. Then the king called for Daniel to whom God had revealed the meaning of the dream.

The whole statue signified the great empires of the world that would succeed each other. The head of gold betokened the reign of Nabuchodonosor himself, most glorious among

kings; the breast and the arms of silver represented the next empire, that of the Medes and Persians; the belly and the thighs of brass prefigured the dominion of Alexander the Great; the legs and feet of iron signified the great Roman empire which conquered all the others. The stone that fell from the mountain⁷, typified a new kingdom that God Himself would found on earth, and which, from a small beginning, would gradually grow strong and overcome all other kingdoms, and that it would last for ever. The king, hearing the interpretation, said to Daniel: "Verily your God is the God of gods⁸, and Lord of kings, and a revealer of hidden things." He raised Daniel to a high station⁹ and bestowed on him many gifts.

¹ A vision shown to him in the night. — ² When he awoke he knew that he had had a dream which had filled him with fear, but he could not remember what it was. The cause of his fear is fully explained by Daniel's description, for the crashing fall of the huge statue must have been terrible. — ³ The parts of the statue were made of different materials: the lower the part, the less costly the material. — ⁴ without the intervention of man. — ⁵ They were required not only to interpret the dream, but to recall to the king's mind what the dream was. This was asking a great deal; but the king made the demand, because these wise men gave out that there was nothing they did not know; so that he thought he was requiring nothing unreasonable. — ⁶ Because of their failure to interpret the dream, all the wise men were condemned to death. Daniel and his friends were included in the condemnation, for they came under the category of "wise men". — ⁷ "cut out without hands". — ⁸ the greatest among the gods. The king acknowledged that the God of Daniel was greater than the pagan gods, because He alone had revealed the meaning of the dream. — ⁹ Governor of the province of Babylon.

About this time king Nabuchodonozor made a great statue of gold¹⁰, which he placed on a pillar in the plain of Babylon. All the princes and nobles of his kingdom were invited to assist at the dedication¹¹ of this statue. Heralds were sent out everywhere to announce to all the people that when they heard the sound of the trumpets and flutes and other instruments of music, they should fall down and adore the golden statue. And it came to pass that no one disobeyed this order except Ananias, Azarias and Misael¹².



It was announced to the king that the three young men had refused to worship the golden statue. Then Nabuchodonozor, full of rage, said to them: "Who is the god that shall deliver you out of my hand?"¹³ They answered: "Our God, Whom we worship, is able to save us from the furnace of burning fire; but if He will not, we will not worship thy god, nor adore the golden statue."¹⁴ The king then ordered that a furnace should be heated seven times more than ordinarily, and that three of the strongest soldiers of his army should bind the young men and cast them, clothed as they were, into the furnace.

The order was instantly executed. But the angel of the Lord went down with the three holy youths into the furnace, and behold, inside, the flames were extinguished, but outside, the fires burned and flashed and destroyed the men who had executed the king's cruel order. They were instantly consumed by the raging fire.

Within the furnace the air was cool and fresh, like to the breeze when the dew is falling. And the three young

men, seeing themselves so wonderfully preserved, sang a glorious canticle of praise and thanksgiving, which the Church of God still sings in her divine service.

The king, astonished¹⁵ to hear voices in the furnace singing, rose up and said to his nobles: "Did we not cast three men, bound, into the midst of the fire? I see four men, loose, and walking in the midst of the fire, and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God."¹⁶

Then going to the door of the furnace, he said: "Ye servants of the Most High God, go ye forth and come." Thereupon the young men came forth safe and sound: not so much as a hair of their heads was burned, nor was the smell of fire on their garments. Seeing this prodigy, Nabuchodonozor blessed God¹⁷, saying: "Blessed be the God of Ananias, Misael, and Azarias, Who has sent His angel, and delivered His servants that believed in Him."

He then decreed that whosoever, in all his kingdom, blasphemed the God Whom these young men adored should be put to death, for that there was no other God Who had power to save. The three young men were raised to high dignities in Babylon.

The last kingdom, or the stone falling from the mountain, mentioned by Daniel, signifies the Catholic Church which Jesus Christ established upon earth. At first it was small, but it kept on increasing, and still increases, and will endure to the end of the world.

¹⁰ The image probably represented Bel, the chief god of the Babylonians, in whose person light and fire were idolatrously worshipped. — ¹¹ the first time of its being publicly worshipped. — ¹² These three were among the principal men of the kingdom, for, at Daniel's proposal, they had been made deputy-governors, under him, of the province of Babylon. For some reason not recorded Daniel himself was not present at this dedication of the image. — ¹³ The king meant to say: "No god can save you from my power." Evidently, the impression made on Nabuchodonozor's mind by the wonderful dream and its interpretation had faded from his memory, for several years had elapsed since then. — ¹⁴ By this beautiful answer the young men conveyed their belief that God could save them if He would, but that they would not dare demand that He should do so, for they did not think themselves worthy that a miracle should be worked on

their behalf. "Anyhow," said they, "we will not worship the image!" — ¹⁵ and filled with fear. — ¹⁶ like a higher and supernatural being. — ¹⁷ This great miracle again convinced Nabuchodonozor that the God Whom the young men served was the Most High God.

II. Commentary.

The object of the revelation made to Nabuchodonozor. Only an obscure revelation was made directly to the heathen king. This filled him with fear, and made him anxious and ready for its further interpretation, which was to be given by a chosen prophet of God. The object of this revelation was manifold. Its first object was to make known to the king and wise men the greatness and wisdom of God. This object was so far gained that Nabuchodonozor professed himself to be convinced that the God of the Jews was greater and more powerful than the gods of the heathen.² Secondly, it was to make known to the proud king, for his humiliation, that his great kingdom would not last for ever, but would fall after his death.³ Thirdly, it was meant to turn the eyes of the whole world to the Messiah, and the everlasting kingdom which He was to found. Such were the chief objects of the revelation made to Daniel. It is essentially a promise of the Messiah.

This twelfth promise of the Messiah treats of the kingdom of God (i. e. of the Messiah) in contradistinction to the kingdoms of this world. The first part of the vision foretold that three great kingdoms would in succession follow Nabuchodonozor's Babylonian empire. This came to pass. The Medeo-Persian empire followed that of Babylon; to that succeeded the Macedonian empire, and to that again the Roman empire. This last was an iron empire, being kept together by the power of the sword; its feet, or foundation, were of iron mixed with earth, and, on account of this weakness, it fell, first into two separate empires, and finally into many separate states. At this stage of the world's history it was that God said He Himself would found another kingdom, which would overthrow paganism, and itself remain standing for ever, this kingdom being the kingdom of the Messiah. The stone which, without any intervention on the part of

man, rolled down the mountain, signifies the Son of God, Who came down from heaven, and by the operation of the Holy Ghost became Man. He founded a spiritual kingdom which fills the whole earth, and which will last for ever, namely the Catholic Church. Our Lord calls Himself a stone (Mat. 21, 42), and St. Peter calls Him the "stone which is become the head of the corner" (Acts 4, 11).

The Church is Catholic. According to Daniel's prophecy, the kingdom of the Messias, which was to overcome its worldly enemies and last for ever, was to be universal as to time and place, or, in other words, Catholic. The prophecy finds its fulfilment only in the Roman-Catholic Church. For she was originally small, but afterwards spread gradually over the whole world, and, in spite of all her enemies, has endured to this day. It follows, therefore, that the Roman-Catholic Church is the true Church, the kingdom of God, having its origin in heaven, and promised by God, through His prophet Daniel.

God governs the world. This prophecy revealed Almighty God to Nabuchodonozor as the "Lord of kings" or, in other words, as the Lord and ruler of the world, from Whom all power comes ("The God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, and strength and power and glory," said Daniel), by Whom nations are overthrown, and raised up again.

The power of prayer said in common. It was only after Daniel and his three friends had prayed together fervently and confidently that the interpretation of the dream was revealed, and that, thereby, not only Daniel and his friends, but all the other wise men and soothsayers were saved from death. Our Lord has encouraged us to pray in common by giving us the promise: "If two of you shall consent on earth concerning anything whatsoever they shall ask, it shall be done for them by my Father Who is in heaven" (Mat. 18, 19).

Humility. Daniel was humble. He gave the glory to God, declaring to the king that it was from Him that the interpretation came. And because he was humble, God exalted him.

Anger, a capital sin. What induced Nabuchodonozor to issue the cruel edict that all the wise men and diviners in the kingdom were to be killed? He was angry at their not being able to do what he wished, and, in his violent anger, he gave the cruel order.

Despotism and cruelty of pagan kings. The command to kill all the diviners and wise men was unjust and cruel. It shows how despotically pagan kings governed, and how little regard they had for the lives of their subjects. Christianity put an end to that kind of cruelty, for it teaches that all men are equally made to the image of God, and that if kings do not govern according to the law of God, they will have to render an account to Him.

The Power and Mercy of God. The mighty miracle which God wrought in order to save His faithful servants, was a great act of mercy towards the heathen. He thereby revealed His power to the king, and to all the great men of the country, and showed that the very elements obey Him. Everybody could see that Bel, whom the young men despised, was powerless to hurt them, and that the God Whom they worshipped was alone Almighty. The king confessed this when he issued the decree that the God of the three youths was the "Most High God, and more mighty than any other god." He was seized by so great a fear of God, that he forbade any blasphemy against Him, under pain of death.

Fortitude. It is impossible not to admire the fortitude of the three young men, whereby they remained true to their faith, and refused to worship idols in spite of the king's terrible threats. If they had bowed down before the golden image they would have denied their faith in the true God, and have been guilty of idolatry. But they feared God more than the king, and loved Him more than aught besides; so they preferred to be burnt to death rather than offend Him grievously. The abstinence which these noble youths had for so long practised enabled them to attain to heroic fortitude. Their unfailing temperance confirmed them in the fear and love of God, and obtained for them the grace of martyrdom. Finally, their fortitude was rewarded by God's saving them from death in a wonderful way.

Resignation to God's will. The example of the three young men shows us that real confidence in God must be united to an entire resignation to His will. They trusted firmly; "God can save us if He will," said they, and they also prayed to be saved; but they left it entirely to God whether He would save them or not, and declared that in no case would they worship the idol.

Prayer of praise and thanksgiving. When God saved the three youths from death by means of His angel, they began with a loud voice to praise and thank God. We too ought always to praise and thank Him when we receive benefits, or are saved from danger.

The three theological virtues of faith, hope and charity were most perfectly practised by the three youths.

Denial of faith. In conclusion I will put to you one question: Ought not the three young men to have obeyed the king's command? Ought they not to have said to themselves: "It would not be right to offend the king who has been so good to us, and who has entrusted us with important posts. We will, therefore, outwardly conform to his wishes, and prostrate ourselves; but in our hearts we will despise the idol, and worship the true God?" Ought they not to have acted thus? No! for they would have outwardly denied their faith, and have led the pagans to think that they believed in Bel.

III. Application.

Pray to the Almighty and All-wise God with the deepest reverence. Give yourself over confidently to His wise and good Providence, for He governs the lives of individuals and of nations as He will. Say with St. Paul (Rom. 11, 33—36): "O the depths of the riches of the wisdom and of the knowledge of God! How incomprehensible are His judgments, and how unsearchable His ways . . . For of Him and by Him and in Him are all things; to Him be glory for ever!"

Are you as ready as were Ananias, Misael, and Azarias to suffer death rather than offend God? If you are not so decided, then you do not love God above all things. Say to-day three Hail Maries for the increase of your faith, the confirmation of your hope, and the kindling of your love.

CHAPTER LXXVIII.

KING BALTASSAR.—THE GOD BEL.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

AFTER the death of Nabuchodonozor, Baltassar, his grandson, ascended the throne. One day Baltassar gave a great banquet ¹ to the nobles of his kingdom, and ordered the golden cups, which his grandfather had taken from the Temple of Jerusalem, to be brought forth and to be used at the banquet.

The sacred vessels were brought, and the king and his wives and his officers drank from them, and they praised their gods of gold and of silver and of stone. At that moment a hand appeared, and fingers were seen writing three words upon the wall over against the king. Baltassar grew pale ² and trembled, for the joints of that hand were moving and wrote: *Mane, Thecel, Phares*. He called for his wise men, that they might interpret the writing. But none of them could do so. Then Daniel, who had received from God the gift of prophecy, together with that of explaining hidden things, came forth, and spoke to the king:

“Thou hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven ³. Thou hast praised thy gods of gold and silver; but the Lord of heaven Who hath thy breath in His hands, thou hast not glorified. Thou knowest that thy grandfather was punished for his pride; that he was driven away from the sons of men, and that he ate grass in the field with the ox and the ass, and yet thou hast not humbled thy heart.

“Wherefore God hath sent the fingers of the hand to write, and this is the writing, and this is the interpretation thereof: *Mane*: God hath numbered thy kingdom ⁴, and hath finished it. *Thecel*: Thou art weighed in the balance and found wanting ⁵. *Phares*: Thy kingdom is divided, and is given to the Medes and Persians.” That very night Baltassar was slain ⁶ and the prophecy of Daniel was thus fulfilled. Some time after, the army of the Medes and Persians, under Darius, their great leader, took the city of Babylon, and divided the kingdom ⁷.

¹ This was on a day when, every year, the Babylonians celebrated a great feast in honour of their gods. It was a great sacrilege to use the sacred vessels of the Temple in honour of their gods. “While

they drank, they praised their gods of gold and of silver, of brass, of iron and of wood and of stones" (Dan. 5, 4); and by so doing they treated with contempt the true God to Whom the vessels were consecrated. — ² He was pale from fear, for his guilty conscience told him that the apparition could foretell nothing favourable to him. — ³ opposed Him, and, as it were, challenged Him. — ⁴ The days of your rule have come to an end. — ⁵ You are found unworthy either to live or reign any longer. — ⁶ by his brother-in-law. — ⁷ The northern part fell to the share of the Medes, and the southern part was possessed by the Persians. When, soon after, the king of the Medes died, leaving no children, both Babylon and Media fell into the hands of the Persian king, Cyrus.

But Cyrus, king of Persia, and successor of Darius, soon took possession of all the Assyrian empire, of which Babylon was the capital. He treated Daniel with marked respect and made him sit down at his own table. At this time the god Bel was worshipped in Babylon as the supreme deity. There were spent upon him every day twelve large measures of flour, forty sheep and sixty vessels of wine.

The king went every day to adore this god Bel. But Daniel adored the true God. Then the king asked him why he did not adore Bel. Daniel replied that he adored the true and living God, Who created earth and heaven, and whose power extends over all things. The king, much surprised, asked Daniel if he did not believe that Bel was a living god, seeing how much he consumed every day.

Daniel smiled and said: "O king, be not deceived, for this Bel is clay within and brass without, neither hath he eaten at any time." The king, being angry, called for the priests of the god, and said to them: "If ye tell me not who it is that eats up these provisions, ye shall die. But if ye can show that Bel eateth these things, Daniel shall die, because he hath blasphemed against Bel." Daniel agreed to the king's proposal.

Then the king, accompanied by Daniel, went to the temple of Bel. And the priests of Bel said to the king. "Behold, we go out, and do thou, O king, set on the meats, and make ready the wine, and shut the door fast, and seal it with thy own ring; and when thou comest in the morning, if thou find not that Bel hath eaten up all, we will suffer death, or else Daniel who hath lied against us."

They were not afraid, because they had a secret door under the altar, whereby they entered and consumed the meats. The priests having gone out, the king caused the meats and the wine to be placed before Bel. This being done, the servants of Daniel brought ashes, and he sifted them⁸ all over the temple in the presence of the king. Then they all left the temple, the door of which was sealed with the royal seal.

But the priests went in by night with their wives and children, as they were accustomed to do, and they ate and drank all that had been placed before the idol. The king arose early in the morning, and went to the temple with Daniel. They found the seal unbroken, and, opening the door, went in. The king looked at the table, and, seeing that all the provisions had disappeared, cried out: "Great art thou, O Bel, and there is not any deceit with thee."

Daniel laughed⁹, and pointing to the floor, said: "Mark, whose footsteps these are!" The king, much amazed, said: "I see the footsteps of men, women and children." Then, examining more closely, he found the secret doors¹⁰, by which the priests were wont to go in and out. Thereupon the king, being enraged against the priests of Bel, ordered them all to be put to death. And he gave Bel up to Daniel, who destroyed him and his temple.

⁸ The ashes were sifted so fine that the priests of Bel could not have remarked them. — ⁹ and held back the king, so that he should not enter and obliterate the footsteps. — ¹⁰ under the altar.

II. Commentary.

The Justice and Faithfulness of God. Baltassar's sudden death was in punishment of the wanton sacrilege which filled up the measure of his sins. His day of grace was past, and God summoned him before His judgment-seat. His overthrow fulfilled Daniel's prophecy to Nabuchodonozor (Chapt. LXXVII), namely that the Assyrian kingdom would come to an end, and that another kingdom would rise up in its place.

Sacrilege. The sacred vessels of the Temple were consecrated to God and might be used by the priests alone for

the divine worship. Therefore, Baltassar's was a threefold sacrilege. ¹Firstly, those who were not priests, and even women, used them. ²Secondly, they were used for the purpose of intoxication. ³Thirdly, in drinking from them, the false gods were honoured and glorified.

Intemperance in drink. It was drunkenness which led the king to commit sacrilege. Drunkenness deprives men, either partially or entirely, of the use of their reason. They no longer consider what they say or do, and bad passions are awakened in their hearts. Such are the consequences of gluttony or intemperance, which is one of the seven capital sins, or sins which are the source of other sins. Drunkenness debases man and makes him like the lower animals. Our Lord Himself thus warns us: "Take heed to yourselves, lest perhaps your hearts be overcharged with surfeiting and drunkenness and the cares of this life: and that day (of judgment) come upon you suddenly" (Luke 21, 34).

Our days are numbered; and as a rule their end comes sooner than we expect. Then comes the judgment, at which all our thoughts, words and actions will be weighed and proved according to their merit before God. All our possessions will be divided, and will pass into other hands after our death.

Zeal for God's Glory. We should admire Daniel's zeal for God's honour and glory. It grieved him to think that so many millions of men should be victims to the folly of idolatry, and be ignorant of the true God. Therefore he laboured to convince them of the nothingness of idols, and to convert them to a belief in God. He knew very well that the obstinate worshippers of false gods, and especially the priests, would hate and persecute him; but in spite of this, and with great skill, he showed up the deception of the priests of Bel, destroyed his image, and also killed a dragon which was worshipped as a god. Daniel was a valiant servant of God, and quite ready to suffer death on account of his faith.

III. Application.

If God punished the desecration of the sacred vessels of the Old Law so severely, how much more heavily will he punish any want of reverence towards the sacraments and

holy things of the New Law. Have you ever made a sacrilegious confession? Resolve to pay more reverence to God's holy Sacraments than you have hitherto done, and make a better preparation before receiving any of them.

CHAPTER LXXIX.

DANIEL IN THE LION'S DEN.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

THE people of Babylon worshipped also a great dragon¹. One day the king said to Daniel: "Behold, thou canst not say now that this is not a living god; adore him, therefore." Daniel replied: "Give me leave, O king, and I will kill this dragon without sword or club." The king returned: "I give thee leave." Then Daniel took pitch, fat and hair, and boiling them together, he made lumps and put them into the dragon's mouth.

The monster, swallowing the lumps, very soon burst asunder, and Daniel said to the king: "Behold him whom you worshipped!" The Babylonians hearing this, assembled in crowds, and said that the king had become a Jew, had destroyed Bel, killed the dragon, and put the priests to death. They came, therefore, to the king, threatening and saying: "Deliver Daniel to us, or else we will destroy thee and thy house."

Although the king loved Daniel, he was forced through the violence of the people to give him up to their fury². Immediately they cast him into a den of lions³. There were seven lions in the den, to whom they gave two carcasses every day, and two sheep; but now, nothing was given them, that they might devour Daniel⁴. Yet Daniel remained unhurt.

¹ A great serpent. — ² in order to avert the outbreak of a revolution. — ³ which was underground and walled in. — ⁴ Forsaken by men, and surrounded by ravening beasts, Daniel remained for six days in constant danger of death. What a terrible position to be in! But the servant of God prayed fervently and confidently, and gave himself over entirely to the divine will.

Daniel having been for some time in the lion's den, needed food. Now there was at that time in Judea a prophet

named Habacuc, who carried food to the field for the reapers.

The angel of the Lord appeared to him and said: "Carry thy dinner to Daniel who is in the lion's den at Babylon."

Habacuc replied: "Lord, I never saw Babylon, nor do I know the den." Then the angel took him by the hair of his head,—carried him in an instant ⁵ to Babylon, and placed him over the den of lions. And Habacuc called to Daniel: "Thou servant of God, take the dinner that God has sent thee!" Daniel exclaimed: "Thou hast remembered me, O God, and Thou hast not forsaken them that love Thee." Then he arose and ate ⁶.

But the angel of the Lord carried Habacuc back to his own place. On the seventh day the king came to bewail Daniel ⁷. And standing near the den he looked in and saw Daniel sitting amongst the lions, and he cried with a loud voice: "Great art Thou, O Lord, the God of Daniel!"

Immediately he drew Daniel out of the den, but those who had desired the prophet's death he threw in, and they were devoured by the lions in a moment. Then the king said: "Let all the inhabitants of the whole earth fear the God of Daniel, for He is the Saviour, working signs and wonders."

⁵ As swiftly as the spirit can transfer itself from one place to another. You can, in thought, convey yourself in an instant to New York. —

⁶ He had been six days in the den, and was very hungry. — ⁷ He took for granted that Daniel had been devoured by the lions.

II. Commentary.

The Goodness of God. Not only did the Lord God protect His faithful servant from the fury of the hungry lions, but he fed him during his captivity in the den in the most wonderful way, sending him food by Habacuc. Full of thankfulness, Daniel exclaimed: "Thou hast remembered me, O God, and Thou hast not forsaken them that love Thee."

The Omnipotence of God worked two miracles on behalf of Daniel. It was miraculous that the wild beasts should remain ravenously hungry rather than devour Daniel. It was also miraculous that Habacuc should in one moment be translated from Judea to Babylon, and back again.

The object of miracles. God worked these miracles, firstly, in order to protect His faithful servant, Daniel; secondly, to manifest Himself to the pagans, and especially to king Cyrus, as the one, true and Almighty God and Lord, and the Saviour working signs and wonders on the earth; and thirdly, so as to move the king to send the people of God back to their own country, and let them rebuild the Temple.

Grace at meals. Before Daniel partook of the food miraculously sent to him, he gratefully remembered the goodness of God, Who had provided him with it. We ought always to thank God for the food which we receive. We say before meals: "Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts which we are going to receive of Thy bounty," and after our meals we thank Him for having fed us, unworthy creatures, and made us to participate in His gifts.

The power of pagan superstition and the wonderful victory of Christianity. This story shows us how deep a root the follies of idolatry had taken among pagan nations. Although Daniel had proved the utter powerlessness of their idols, and although God had manifested His own Omnipotence by the most wonderful miracles, they would not abandon idolatry; and even the king could not save Daniel from their fury. If we consider all this it makes us realise how wonderful was the complete triumph of Christianity over paganism. It is a noble work both for God and our neighbour, to support Catholic missionaries, who preach the religion of the cross to the heathen at the peril of their own lives.

III. Application.

Have you always said your grace devoutly? Even the beasts without reason are grateful to those who feed them; so how can reasonable men not be grateful to their Lord and Creator, Who gives them life and health, food and drink.

We were all created for the glory of God. What have you done hitherto for His glory? Could you not prevent many sins among your comrades? Could you not offer your daily labours and burdens to God. Do not forget to frame your intention thus, every day: "O my God, I will do everything for Thy glory."

AFTER THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY

(from 536 B. C. until the Birth of Christ).

CHAPTER LXXX.

RETURN OF THE JEWS FROM BABYLON (536 B. C.).

I. Narrative and Explanation.

THE prophet Jeremias had foretold that the captivity of Babylon¹ would not last longer than seventy years², and that the Jews should then return to their own country. Daniel had renewed this consoling promise, and had added another prophecy of greater importance; namely, that from the day on which the order should be given to rebuild Jerusalem till the death of the Messias, there would remain only seventy weeks of years; that is, four hundred and ninety years. So that the Jews knew not only the family from which the Saviour would spring, but also the city where He would be born, and the year in which He would die³.

The severe sufferings of the captivity of Babylon, together with the exhortations of the prophets, particularly those of Daniel and Ezechiel, had brought the Jewish people to a sense of their duty. Wherefore it happened that in the seventieth⁴ year of their sad captivity, Cyrus, king of Persia, by a divine inspiration, issued an edict that all the Jews who were in his kingdom should go back⁵ to Jerusalem and rebuild the Temple of the Lord.

He also restored to them the sacred vessels which Nabuchodonozor had carried away⁶. Thereupon more than forty thousand Israelites, under the leadership of Prince Zorobabel, and of the High Priest Josue, returned to Judea, the name thenceforward given to the ancient kingdom of Juda, together with the remnants of the other ten tribes, which had joined themselves to Juda and Benjamin before the downfall of Israel. They immediately built an altar⁷, and offered sacrifice every morning and evening.

One year after the return from captivity, the foundations of the new Temple were laid in Jerusalem. The priests and

the Levites were there with their trumpets and cymbals, as of old, singing to the Lord canticles of praise and thanksgiving, while the people all rejoiced with exceeding great joy. And when, after many years, the Temple was completed, it was consecrated and dedicated with great solemnity.

¹ Which took place 606 B. C. — ² “When”, said the Lord by the mouth of the prophet Jeremias, “the seventy years shall be accomplished, I will bring you again to the place, for I think towards you thoughts of peace and not of affliction.” It is as if He said: “Though I have given you over to captivity, I have no intention of giving you over for ever to affliction, but I mean to lead you to repentance by suffering, and when you have repented, I will be gracious to you again.” — ³ The walls of Jerusalem were built up 453 B. C. From that time to the beginning of the public life of our Lord were sixty-nine weeks, or 483 years — i. e. 453 years to the time of His Birth, to which are added the thirty years of His hidden life. In the middle of the seventieth “week of years” our Lord Jesus Christ died upon the cross. — ⁴ counting from the first carrying off of the people into captivity, to the year 536 (from 606—70 = 536). — ⁵ This was not a command, only a permission. — ⁶ Cyrus gave back 5,400 vessels of gold and silver which had belonged to the Temple. — ⁷ on the same spot where the altar of holocausts used to stand.

Many of the old people who remembered the former Temple, wept to see that the new one did not equal the old in magnificence.

But the prophet Aggeus consoled them with the assurance that the second Temple should be more glorious than the first, because the Messias, the Desired of all nations⁸, would be seen in it, and would honour it with His presence. The same prediction was made by the prophet Zachary⁹.

About eighty years after their return from captivity, the Jews, by command of the king of Persia, commenced to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem¹⁰. The Samaritans opposed them and tried even by violence to prevent the people from rebuilding their city. But the Jews prayed to God to assist them, and in order to prevent surprise from the Samaritans, divided themselves into two great bodies¹¹.

Those who were most brave and courageous they placed on the outposts of the city, well armed, in order to keep off the enemy, while those who were skilled in masonry and

other mechanical arts, carried on the work. At the end of fifty-two days all the walls and ramparts were completed. The Samaritans, seeing that the hand of God was there, ceased to trouble their neighbours.

The Jews, understanding that they had been successful in rebuilding the Temple and walls of Jerusalem in spite of so many obstacles, returned sincere thanks to God. And Esdras, the High Priest, having publicly read the law of the Lord, they all promised, with tears, to be faithful to it ¹². For they had received a new and strong proof that God had forgiven their own sins, and the ingratitude of their fathers.

⁸ "Yet one little while," said Aggeus, "and the Desired of all nations shall come (the Messiah, Whom, as Jacob [Chapt. XXVII] had already prophesied, all nations should expect.), and great shall be the glory of this house more than of the first." — ⁹ "Rejoice greatly," said he, "daughter of Jerusalem. Behold, thy king will come to thee, the Just, the Saviour. He is poor, and riding on the foal of an ass", i. e. on a young ass never yet ridden, not on a proud horse such as the kings of this earth ride on. — ¹⁰ the walls of the city, and fortifications. — ¹¹ At first the Samaritans wished to help with the building of the Temple, but Josue and Zorobabel rejected their help, fearing that the Jews who believed what was true, might be infected by their heathen practices. Then the Samaritans were offended, and tried to hinder the work of rebuilding; but so long as an attack from them was to be feared, Nehemias, the leader of the Jews, commanded that a portion of the people should carry arms while working at the building, so as to be ready to repel the enemy. Nehemias had been cup-bearer to Artaxerxes, king of Persia, and he it was who had obtained permission to build up the walls of Jerusalem. He was appointed governor of Judea. — ¹² But the Jews soon got lax in their observance of the Law, and did things forbidden by it, such as marrying with gentiles, neglecting to pay tithes, or to make offerings to the Temple. Moreover they offered sacrifices of blind, lame, or blemished beasts.

II. Commentary.

God's Mercy to the people of Israel was very great. These faithless people had broken the covenant made with God, and had given themselves over to idolatry and a pagan way of living. God sent prophet after prophet to move them to repent, but the prophets were despised and persecuted, and

Israel remained impenitent. At last the judgments threatened by God overtook His people. He punished them by letting them be carried off into captivity, but He punished them only for the purpose of converting them. When the Jews, full of mourning and sorrow, left their home, God gave them the comforting assurance: "When seventy years shall be accomplished, I will bring you again to this place. I think towards you thoughts of peace and not of affliction." And after the Jews were converted to Him, and had renounced idolatry for good and all, He restored everything to them, their country, their temple, their worship, and their hope in the coming of the Messiah. The whole history of the people of Israel is one continuous proof of God's infinite goodness and mercy, one long chain of divine favours bestowed on a sinful nation, one long fight between divine mercy, and human obduracy.

The Faithfulness of God is the ground of all our hope. He promised, through Jeremias, that His people should return to Jerusalem after a captivity of seventy years, and this promise was most literally fulfilled; for by a miracle God inclined the heart of king Cyrus towards the Jews, filling him with the fear of God, so that he issued an edict for the return of the Jews and the rebuilding of the Temple. This instance of the faithful fulfilment of God's promises ought to give us a great confidence that He will perform everything that He has said.

The thirteenth promise of the Messiah (through Aggeus) foretells the speedy coming of the Desired of all nations, and gives the assurance that on account of His Presence in it, the new Temple would be made more glorious than the splendid Temple of Solomon. Jesus Christ, God made Man, was presented in that Temple as a Child, stayed behind in it as a Boy of twelve years; and, as a Man, He prayed there, taught there, and worked miracles there.

The fourteenth promise of the Messiah. It might have been gathered from the prophecy of Aggeus about the glory which the Messiah would shed on the Temple, that He would come with great majesty and pomp; but the prophecy of Zachary

made it plain that, though the long-desired One would indeed be a king, He would not wield an earthly power, but would enter Jerusalem in poverty and simplicity (New Test. LIX).

Unity is strength. The number of Jews who at first returned from Babylon was not very great, but they held faithfully together, and accomplished the rebuilding of the Temple and of the walls of Jerusalem.

III. Application.

Are you not ungrateful to God, and very often lukewarm in His service, and negligent in prayer and in the receiving of the holy Sacraments? In truth you owe God much more gratitude than did the Jews!

CHAPTER LXXXI.

ESTHER.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

AS the government of the kings of Persia was exceedingly mild, many of the Jews remained in the kingdom of Babylon. God permitted this for the spiritual good of the gentiles, so that the latter, being brought into daily contact with the Jews, might more easily arrive at the knowledge of the true God, and be instructed in the promises made concerning a Saviour to come.

It happened, by a special dispensation of God, that many of the Jews, like Daniel and his companions in former years, were in high favour with the kings of Persia and made use of their influence to protect their country-men, and to propagate the true faith. At a certain time it pleased divine Providence to employ in this way a pious Jewess, named Esther.

She lived in the reign of Assuerus, in the house of Mardochai, her uncle, who had brought her up from her infancy¹. Assuerus, having seen her, was pleased with her beauty and virtue, placed the crown upon her head, and made her his queen. But she, by Mardochai's advice, left the king in ignorance concerning her nation. And Mardochai² who loved Esther as his own child, came every day and sat at the gate of the palace.

Now it came to pass that two officials of the palace had conspired together to kill the king. Mardochai, having discovered the plot, revealed it to Esther, who immediately told the king. The affair being examined, Mardochai's statement was found to be true. The two conspirators were hanged, and the facts recorded in the annals of the kingdom.

Some time after, Assuerus raised a certain Aman³ to the highest dignity in the empire. All the king's servants bent the knee before Aman and worshipped him. Mardochai alone did not bend the knee before Aman, as he would not give to man the honour due to God alone⁴. Aman, perceiving this, and learning that Mardochai was a Jew, became very angry. To be revenged on Mardochai, he told Assuerus that the Jews were planning a revolt, and prevailed upon the king to publish an edict commanding all the Jews in his empire to be put to death⁵, and their property to be taken away.

¹ She had been left an orphan in early life, and her uncle, Mardochai, who lived at Susa, the Persian capital, adopted her and brought her up. On account of her beauty, modesty and innocence, Assuerus chose her to be his queen, out of all the maidens presented to him for choice. Assuerus is known in profane history as Xerxes I., the celebrated king of Persia, who reigned from 485—465 B. C. — ² He held an office about the court. — ³ He was a Mede, and was raised by the king to the post of Grand-Vizier, which was the highest in the kingdom after the king's own. — ⁴ It was not, therefore, pride which made him refuse to bow the knee before Aman, but a religious sense of duty, which forbade him to render divine homage to any man. — ⁵ The edict was issued in April, 474, that on a certain day in March, 473, every Jew was to be massacred. The day of this general massacre was decided by lot, and the order was made known by messengers throughout the length and breadth of the kingdom. What terror must have seized all the Jews! It is written in the Book of Esther (Chapt. 4): "In all the provinces, towns and places to which the king's cruel edict was come, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting, wailing and weeping, many using sackcloth and ashes for their bed." They tried by these severe penances to avert the calamity.

The Jews were terrified and began to weep and lament. But Mardochai told Esther of the edict, so that she might intercede with the king for her own people.

Then Esther said: "All the provinces know that whosoever cometh into the king's inner court, who is not called for, is immediately put to death. How then can I go in to the king, not being called?" To these words Mardochai replied: "Who knoweth whether thou art not therefore come to the kingdom that thou mightest be ready for such a time as this?" Esther, therefore, praying fervently, and abstaining from food and drink for three days, resolved to go in to the king, not being called, against the law, and to expose herself to death and to danger.

On the third day she put on her glorious apparel and wore her glittering robes, and passed through the door with a smiling countenance which hid a mind full of anguish, and exceeding great fear. But when the king had lifted up his face, and with burning eyes had shown the wrath of his heart⁶, Esther sank down and rested her head upon her handmaid. Then the king was seized with pity. He leaped from his throne, and upheld her in his arms and said: "What is the matter, Esther? I am thy brother, fear not! Thou shalt not die, for this law is not made for thee, but for all others. What wilt thou, queen Esther?" She, recovering herself, answered: "If it please the king, I beseech thee to come to me this day, and Aman with thee, to the banquet which I have prepared."

The king acceded to her wish; and during the repast he desired to know her request. She answered: "If it please the king to give me what I ask, and to fulfil my petition, let the king and Aman come again to the banquet which I have prepared them, and to-morrow I will open my mind to the king." The king promised to do so, and Aman left the palace with a joyful heart⁷. But in going out he saw Mardochai sitting at the door of the palace. And because Mardochai would not bow down before him like the others, he was filled with rage; and going home to his house, ordered a gallows fifty cubits high to be erected to hang Mardochai on the following morning.

⁶ Because she had approached the throne without being summoned. With great prudence she abstained from at once presenting her chief

petition, and only invited the king to sup with her. The king would probably have been angry when he discovered that she had concealed her nationality from him. — ⁷ For it was an extraordinary honour for him to be invited alone to supper with the king.

Now it happened that the king could not sleep that night, and to divert his mind he ordered the annals of his reign to be read to him. When the reader came to the place which related how Mardochai had discovered the plot against the king's life, Assuerus suddenly asked what reward Mardochai had received for this important service. He was told that the man had never received any reward. Then



the king called for Aman whom he asked what ought to be done to honour the man whom the king desired to honour.

Aman, supposing that there was question of himself, said that the man whom the king desired to honour, ought to be clothed with the king's appa-

rel, and be set upon the king's horse, and have the royal crown put upon his head, and that the first of the king's princes and nobles should hold his horse, and, going through the streets of the city, they should proclaim before him: "Thus shall he be honoured, whom the king hath a mind to honour!"

Then the king said to him: "Make haste and take the robe and the horse, and do, as thou hast spoken, to Mardochai, the Jew, who sitteth before the gate of the palace ⁸.

⁸ This was a great humiliation for the proud man who had hitherto been the king's favourite. He had reckoned on the certainty that the king would give him permission to hang Mardochai on the gallows he had already set up; and instead of this he was now forced to pay

the utmost honour to the detested Jew! No wonder that he was sad, and forgot all about the invitation to supper! The king knew that Mardochai was a Jew, and yet ordered this honour to be shown him. He had, therefore, either forgotten his murderous edict against the Jews; or else he contemplated only a partial execution of the order which he had so rashly given. Anyhow, Aman saw that his own glory was coming to an end.

Aman was surprised and enraged to hear these words, but he dared not disobey the word of the king. He went, therefore, and did as he was ordered. Meanwhile the hour came for the queen's banquet, and Aman went thither in all haste.

While they sat at the table the king said again to the queen: "What is thy petition, Esther, that it may be granted thee? Although thou ask the half of my kingdom thou shalt have it." Esther replied: "If I have found favour in thy sight, O king, give me my life, for which I ask, and my people for which I request. For we are given up, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish."⁹

The king, in surprise, asked: "Who is this, and of what power that he should dare to do these things?" Esther answered: "It is Aman that is our most wicked enemy." But Aman, hearing what the queen said, was seized with terror. The king arose from the table in great wrath¹⁰. Being told by one of the attendants that Aman had prepared a gibbet fifty cubits high whereon to hang Mardochai, he ordered Aman himself to be hanged upon it.

The same day king Assuerus raised Mardochai to the high dignity which Aman had held, and the edict against the Jews was immediately revoked. The Jews rejoiced beyond measure at their unexpected deliverance, and many of the gentiles, seeing how wonderfully God protected them, embraced their religion¹¹. Queen Esther is a striking figure of Mary, the immaculate Queen of Heaven. For as Esther alone was exempted from the law of death, so Mary alone was preserved from original sin, in which the rest of mankind are born into this world. Again, Esther saved her people from slaughter, and Mary, by her intercession, saves all her faithful clients from the flames of hell.

⁹ By these words Esther revealed that she was a Jewess. — ¹⁰ and walked about in the garden, thinking over what should be done to Aman. — ¹¹ The Jews celebrated a great feast in honour of their deliverance, the anniversary of which has been kept ever since.

II. Commentary.

The Goodness and Providence of God extended itself not only to the Jews who returned to Judea, but also to those who remained behind in the pagan country. He protected them, and rescued them completely from the destruction planned against them by Aman. Their deliverance really was wonderful, for divine Providence so adapted circumstances that the projected plan of massacre was simply brought to nought. By God's Providence Esther was raised to be queen. Again, it was by His Providence that Mardochai discovered the conspirators' plot; and also that the annals of the reign were read to the king that night when he could not sleep, the name of Mardochai being thus recalled to him. By His grace God changed the anger of the king to gentleness, and moved him to grant Esther's petition. So also it was God Who turned the plans of wicked Aman to his own shame, Who saved His people from destruction, and made His name glorious among the gentiles.

Pride is, firstly, a capital sin which leads to many other sins. See what a number of sins Aman's pride led him to commit. It made him hate Mardochai, and extend his hatred to all the Jews. He calumniated them to the king, and obtained thereby an unjust edict for their massacre. His blind hatred grew to such an extent that he could not even wait for the day of the general massacre of the Jews, but wished to have Mardochai hanged at once.

Pride, moreover, makes men unhappy and discontented. Aman possessed riches, power and honours, and was held to be the most fortunate of men. But this highly-favoured man was discontented, and thought himself ill-used, because one individual Jew refused to pay him the homage that was paid to him by others. His injured pride embittered his life, and gave him sleepless nights.

Pride, thirdly, leads to humiliation and downfall. In Aman were fulfilled the words of Scripture: "Pride goeth before destruction, and the spirit is lifted up before a fall" (Prov. 16, 18). His pride paved the way to his utter abasement. Imagining that he himself must be the man whom the king most wanted to honour, he obtained really royal honours for his enemy; and had to pay this honour himself to the hated Mardochai, and proclaim his glory to the whole city. His injured pride made him desire the destruction of the Jews; but this blood-thirsty project it was which led to his own fall and ignominious death.

The four cardinal virtues. This story affords a shining example of each of these virtues.

1. *Prudence.* Mardochai, Esther and all the Jews acted very prudently, because in their hour of need and peril they had recourse to prayer and fasting. They were convinced that these good works were pleasing to God, and that they would thereby obtain help and deliverance at the hands of the Almighty. They also used every human means of help which prudence suggested.

2. *Justice.* The king fulfilled a duty imposed by justice when he rewarded Mardochai who had saved his life, and punished Aman who had induced him to issue a cruel and murderous edict. It was also an act of justice on his part, when, having assured himself of the innocence of the Jews, he recalled and annulled the edict.

3. *Temperance.* Assuerus practised this virtue when, obedient to divine grace, he subdued his rising anger against Esther and listened favourably to her petition. But Aman, on the other hand, sinned against this virtue, when he let himself be carried away by his anger against Mardochai, and conceived the atrocious project of having every Jew in the kingdom massacred.

4. *Fortitude.* Esther, though raised to be queen, remained humble, pious, and full of confidence in God. This made her valiantly risk her life in order to save her people. She knew that the passionate king would be in a violent rage when she appeared, unsummoned, in his presence, but she

prayed, and hoped that God would soften the king's heart; nor was her trust misplaced. Confidence in God gives fortitude.

Esther is a type of the ever Blessed Virgin Mary. Esther, on account of her beauty, was raised from her low estate to be queen: Mary, on account of the beauty of her pure and humble heart, was raised to be the Mother of the Redeemer, and, afterwards, Queen of Heaven. Esther alone was exempted from the king's severe law: Mary alone is exempted from the curse of original sin. Esther, adorned in splendid garments, went before the king, prayed for her people, and was heard: Mary, the Queen of Heaven, radiant with virtues and merits, went before the throne of God, offering her powerful prayers for her people.

Concealing sin. Was it right of Mardochai to reveal the conspiracy against the king's life which he had discovered? He was doubly bound to do so, both as a servant of God and as a servant of the king. To conceal the sin of others, when you can prevent it by revealing it, is one of the nine ways of sharing in the guilt of others.

III. Application.

Are you easily moved to anger? Have you in anger insulted, struck, or wished ill to others? Just observe the words and actions of an angry man, and you will see what a hateful passion anger is. Do not allow yourself to be ever carried away by it, but suppress its very first movements. If the angry impulse comes, be silent, and say within yourself: O gentle Jesus, have mercy on me and help me to overcome anger.

CHAPTER LXXXII.

TRANSLATION OF THE OLD TESTAMENT INTO GREEK (285 B. C.).—WISE SAYINGS OF JESUS, THE SON OF SIRACH.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

THE Jews, who had returned to their country, lived in peace for two hundred years under the dominion of the successors of Cyrus. This peace was not disturbed even

when Alexander the Great, king of Macedon, destroyed the Persian empire. Whilst Alexander lived, he treated the Jews with great kindness; but when, at his death, the Macedonian empire was divided, evil times came upon Judea.

That province formed the object of dispute between the kings of Syria and those of Egypt, who made it the battleground for their contending armies, so that it was turned almost into a desert. As a natural consequence of these protracted wars, ignorance, corruption and vice struck daily deeper root among the Jewish people. This was one of the darkest periods of their history¹.

It was about this time that the king of Egypt wished to have a Greek translation of the sacred books of the Jews². He therefore expressed his desire to the High Priest at Jerusalem, who granted the request and sent to Alexandria, the capital of Egypt, seventy-two wise men well versed both in Greek and in Hebrew. These men were kindly received by the king, and made a correct translation for him. At that time educated men among the heathen nations knew and spoke the Greek language. Hence this translation of the Scriptures began to be read by the pagans, who thereby came to the knowledge of the true God, and to the belief in the Messias. Thus do we see the hand of divine Providence, in His design to prepare the gentiles for the coming of the Saviour.

Almighty God also inspired a pious Jew, called Jesus, the son of Sirach³, to write a work on religious and moral instruction, which forms one of the books of the Catholic Bible, and is called *Ecclesiasticus*. The following beautiful maxims taken from it deserve careful study. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning and a crown of wisdom. The word of God is the fountain of wisdom, and her ways are everlasting commandments. The fear of the Lord shall delight the heart, and shall give joy, and gladness, and length of days. It shall go well with him that feareth the Lord, and in the days of his end he shall be blessed. My son, from thy youth up receive instruction, and even to thy gray hairs thou shalt find wisdom.

"Come to her as one that plougheth and soweth, and wait for her good fruits. For in working about her thou

shalt labour a little, and shalt quickly eat of her fruits. Take all that shall be brought upon thee, and keep patience, for gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation. Hear the judgment of your father and grieve him not in his life. The father's blessing establisheth the houses of the children, but the mother's curse rooteth up the foundation.

"Despise not a man in his old age, for we also shall become old. Despise not the discourse of them that are ancient and wise; but acquaint thyself with their proverbs. Praise not a man for his beauty, neither despise a man for his look. The bee is small among flying things, but her fruit hath the chiefest sweetness. Be in peace with many, but let one of a thousand be thy counsellor.

"Nothing can be compared to a faithful friend, and no weight of gold and silver is able to countervail the goodness of his fidelity. If thou wouldst get a friend, try him before thou takest him, and do not credit him easily. For there is a friend for his own occasion, and he will not abide in the day of thy trouble. A lie is a foul blot in a man. In nowise speak against the truth, but be ashamed of the lie in thy ignorance.

"Let not the naming of God be usual in thy mouth, and meddle not with the names of saints. A man that sweareth much shall be filled with iniquity, and a scourge shall not depart from his house. Before thou hear, answer not a word, and interrupt not others in the midst of their discourse. Hast thou heard a word against thy neighbour, let it die within thee, trusting that it will not burst thee. Hedge in thy ears with thorns; hear not a wicked tongue; and make doors and bars to thy mouth.

"Melt down thy gold and silver, and make a balance for thy words. Flee from sin as from the face of a serpent. All iniquity is like a two-edged sword; there is no remedy for the wound thereof. Observe the time and fly from evil. He that loveth danger shall perish therein, and he that toucheth pitch shall be defiled with it. In every work of thine regard thy soul in faith, for this is the keeping of the

commandments. In all thy works remember thy last end, and thou shalt never sin."

¹ After about 400 B. C. God sent no more prophets to His people. The last of the prophets, Malachias, was raised up to upbraid the people for their falling away from the correct observance of the Law. Regarding the priests we read: "I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of hosts: and I will not receive a gift of your hand. For from the rising of the sun even to the going down, my name is great among the gentiles, and in every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered to My name a clean oblation." — ² The Holy Scriptures of the Old Testament consist of twenty-one historical books, seven moral books, and seventeen prophetical books. The historical books are: the five Books of Moses, the Book of Josue, the Judges, Ruth, the four Books of Kings, two Paralipomena, two of Esdras, Tobias, Judith, and two of Machabees. The doctrinal books are: Job, the Psalms, Proverbs, the Preacher, the Song of Solomon, Wisdom and Ecclesiasticus. The prophetical books are: Isaias, Jeremias, with the Lamentations, Ezechiel, Daniel, Osee, Joel, Amos, Abdias, Jonas, Baruch, Micheas, Nahum, Habacuc, Sophonias, Aggeus, Zacharias, and Malachias. — ³ This book contains maxims, sayings and lessons on, and praises of the great men of Israel. It was written about 180 B. C.

II. Commentary.

The fifteenth promise of the Messias (through Malachias) is of great importance for the Catholic faith, since, as the Council of Trent, in union with the Fathers of the Church, teaches, it contains a most clear prophecy of the unbloody Sacrifice of the New Testament, or, in other words, of the most holy Sacrifice of the Mass. Let us examine what it is that God promised by the mouth of the prophet Malachias.

By the words "From the rising of the sun—for my name is great among the gentiles" God announced that many nations instead of only one would worship Him. Then He further foretold: a) that a sacrifice would be offered to Him, not in one place only as with the Jews, but in all places; b) that this sacrifice would be a clean oblation or offering, c) and a meat-offering or, in other words, an unbloody sacrifice; d) and that it would be a perfect sacrifice, and take the place of the Jewish sacrifices. Now, in what way does the holy Sacrifice of the Mass correspond with and fulfil this prophecy? a) The holy Sacrifice of the Mass was

instituted at the Last Supper, and is offered up in every Catholic church all over the world. b) It is a clean oblation, nay, the most clean, the most holy oblation that can be, for in it is offered up Jesus Christ, the All-holy Son of God. c) It is an unbloody Sacrifice, and at the same time it is a meat-offering, for in it Jesus Christ offers Himself in an unbloody manner in the holy Mass, under the form of bread and wine, and gives Himself in Holy Communion to be the Food of both priest and people. d) It replaces the sacrifices of the Old Testament, which were only types of this, the spotless Sacrifice of the New Testament, and which are fulfilled by it.

III. Application.

Thank God in an especial manner for the most holy Sacrifice of the Mass, and resolve that you will assist at it frequently and with devotion.

CHAPTER LXXXIII.

THE MARTYRDOM OF ELEAZAR (168 B. C.).

I. Narrative and Explanation.

THE most terrible trial which the Jews had to undergo, was that which came upon them at the time when they were made subject to the proud and cruel Antiochus, king of Syria¹. The king ordered the Holy Books to be torn and burnt; he profaned the Temple, and forbade the observance of the divine laws under the penalty of death.

Unhappily, many of the Jews, yielding to a guilty fear, obeyed the king's order; but many more refused to comply with the impious mandate, and chose to die rather than violate the holy precept of God. Among these was an old man named Eleazar, ninety-nine years of age, who was renowned as a doctor of the law.

¹ The Jews lived under the Persian supremacy in peace and quiet. This lasted till 329 B. C. In that year, Alexander the Great, who had conquered the Persian empire, took possession of Judea and Jerusalem; but he was favourable to the Jews and allowed them to practise their religion, for which he had a great respect. When Alexander died

(323 B. C.), his four principal generals divided his vast empire; and the Jews lived for a hundred years under the Egyptian rule which was in no way oppressive. But in the year 200 Judea fell under the dominion of the kings of Syria. The worst of these kings was Antiochus IV., of whom we read in this story. He fell on Jerusalem with a large army in the year 169, killed 40,000 inhabitants, and plundered the Temple. He proclaimed Greek paganism to be the religion of the state, and, in 167 B. C., having in all sorts of ways desecrated the Temple, he set up in it the image of the Greek god Zeus (Jupiter). All the Jews were forbidden under pain of death to practise any religion but that of the state. They did not dare to circumcise their male children, or observe their sabbaths and festivals, or offer sacrifice to the true God.

When Eleazar refused to eat swine's flesh, the use of which was forbidden by the law of Moses, they opened his mouth by force to compel him to eat. But he still refused, and declared that he would undergo any torment that might be inflicted on him, rather than stain his soul with sin by a violation of the commandment of God². Then some of those who stood by, pitying the good old man, advised him to eat of other meat which was not forbidden, so as to feign compliance with the king's command.

Eleazar replied: "It does not become our age to dissemble." He then explained to these false friends that even if he made a mere show of complying with the king's orders in this matter, the young men of his nation might be tempted to follow his example, saying: "The aged Eleazar has become a pagan, why may not we do the same?" Moreover, he exclaimed: "Though for the present time I should be delivered from the punishment of men, yet should I not escape the hand of the Almighty, neither alive nor dead."³

Having thus spoken, the holy old man was dragged to the place of execution, where he suffered a glorious death⁴. In the midst of his torments he cried out: "Lord, Thou knowest I suffer grievous pains, but I am well content to suffer these things, because I fear Thee." Eleazar, by his steadfast adherence to the law of God, and the fortitude wherewith he suffered a most cruel martyrdom, has left a noble example of fidelity and heroic virtue.

² He was stretched upon a rack and unmercifully scourged. —
³ But why did Eleazar refuse to eat meat which it was allowed to him to eat? Firstly, because he would have thereby dissembled and acted as if he had apostatised from the true faith. Secondly, because by this seeming apostasy he would have given a bad example, and scandal to the Jewish young men. Thirdly, he would have deserved punishment at God's hands. — ⁴ by being scourged till he gave up his spirit.

II. Commentary.

Firm faith. Eleazar was strong and steadfast in faith, preferring to die under torture rather than deny his faith by eating the forbidden meat.

The fear of God. The fortitude with which Eleazar endured his torture, proceeded from the holy fear of God, to whom he said in presence of the bystanders: "I am well content to suffer, because I fear Thee"; being persuaded within himself: "If I escape from this torture by a miserable hypocrisy, I could not escape the punishment of God." It is thus we ought to reason when tempted either to do what is wrong, or to neglect what is right. Our Lord has spoken these warning words: "Fear not them that kill the body, and are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him that can destroy both soul and body in hell" (Mat. 10, 28).

Bad example. Eleazar wished to avoid even the appearance of sin, and therefore refused to adopt the suggestion made to him of secretly eating meat which was allowed, though he seemed to be eating swine's flesh. Every one would have thought that he had eaten forbidden meat, and as he himself said he would thus have given a bad example to all the Jews, and especially to the young. This act would also have drawn others into transgressing the law and denying their faith. Those who are the occasion of sin in other persons give scandal, and sin against the Fifth Commandment.

Counselling sin. Did those who advised Eleazar to act as if he had eaten the forbidden meat commit sin? Yes, for though it is true that they felt full of compassion for the

poor, weak, aged man, they felt no compassion for his soul; and it was, after all, a very erroneous sort of compassion which made them counsel him to commit a sin.

The shameful faithlessness of many Christians. Our Lord Jesus Christ had not died for Eleazar. He had not received the teaching and graces of Christianity, nor was heaven open to him; and yet he gave a splendid example of fortitude! How much more shameful would it be for Christians to deny their faith, having, in very truth, before them the example of our Lord, of the holy apostles, and of the 13,000,000 martyrs of the Catholic Church, and receiving, as they do, so many graces from God!

III. Application.

Are you ready to suffer a painful death rather than deny the holy Catholic faith, or commit any other grievous sin? Do you pray for the gift of fortitude?

If a Catholic eats meat on Friday, he acts as if he were not a Catholic, and refuses obedience to the Church of God. Do you always observe the days of abstinence?

CHAPTER LXXXIV.

THE MARTYRDOM OF THE SEVEN MACHABEES.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

ANTIOCHUS¹ commanded that a certain widow, with her seven sons², should be brought into his presence, and should be forced to eat of the forbidden flesh. They all told him that, as their law did not allow them the use of such meat, they could not obey his command. He immediately had them scourged with whips.

The eldest of the brothers told the king that they were ready to die rather than transgress the law of their God. Then the king, enraged at the young man's boldness, ordered his tongue to be plucked out, the skin of his head to be torn from it, his hands and feet to be cut off, and finally that he should be burnt alive before his mother and brothers. While he was suffering these cruel torments³, his mother and his brothers exhorted him to die courageously.

¹ See preceding chapter. — ² These brothers are called the seven Machabees, because their heroic sufferings are related in the second Book of Machabees. It is generally believed that the seven brothers and their mother were martyred in the year 166 at Antiochia, the city where the king resided, situated not far from the sea, to the north-east of the island of Cyprus. — ³ According to 2 Mach. 7, 5, his martyrdom lasted a long time. Picture to yourself the horrors of this prolonged torture. The king hoped that the cruel torments of the eldest brother would frighten the younger ones into submission; but instead of this, they encouraged each other to follow his example.

The first brother being dead, they seized the second, and, having torn the skin from off his head, they asked him if he would eat rather than undergo the rest of the torments. But he, refusing no less firmly and courageously than his elder brother, was tortured in the same way till he expired. When he was about to die he exclaimed: "Thou, O most wicked man, destroyest us out of this present life, but the King of the world ⁴ will raise us up who die for His laws, in the resurrection of eternal life."

The third brother offered his hands and feet to be cut off, saying: "These I have from heaven, but, for the law of God, I now despise them, because I hope to receive them again from Him." Some minutes before his death he declared aloud his willingness to die for God, as his brothers had already done. When he was dead, the fourth brother, the fifth, and the sixth—were all three subjected to the same torments as their elder brothers, but each one died in the same manner, having the same spirit. They made no account of pain and death, because they suffered all for God.

⁴ The Jews shrank from uttering aloud the name of God; so, instead, they used some other term, such as "heaven" or the "King of the world".

The king and his courtiers were amazed at the constancy of these young men, so that when the seventh, a mere youth, was brought forward, the king told him, with an oath, that he would make him rich and happy if he would obey his command ⁵. Seeing that his words had no effect on the courageous boy, Antiochus called on the mother to advise her son for his own good.



The mother agreed to do so. Then, addressing her son⁶, she said with all a mother's tender affection: "My son, look upon heaven and earth, and all that is in them; and consider that God made them out of nothing, and mankind also; so thou shalt not fear this tormentor, but, being made a worthy partner with thy brethren⁷, receive death, that in that mercy I may receive thee again with thy brethren."⁸

While she was yet speaking, the boy said: "For whom do you stay? I will not obey the commandment of the king, but the commandment of the law which was given us by Moses." Then, turning to the king⁹: "Thou," said he, "thou that hast been the author of all mischief against the Hebrews, shalt not escape the hand of God." But the king, inflamed with rage, tortured him most cruelly till he yielded up his soul. Last of all the mother herself was put to death.

⁵ The king thought that by fair promises he would be able to induce the boy, as he was young and weak, to apostatise. — ⁶ She spoke to him in her native Jewish tongue. She purposely made use of a language which the king could not understand, for, had he taken in what she was saying, he would have at once torn the boy from

her, and she would not have been able to speak any more to him. — ⁷ “Prove that you have as much fortitude and as great a fear of God as had your brothers!” — ⁸ “For if you turn from your faith you will not attain to eternal life.” — ⁹ “We suffer thus for our sins,” he also said, “and though the Lord our God is angry with us a little while, yet He will be reconciled again to His servants” (2 Mach. 7, 32, 33). He was not alluding to their own particular sins, but to the sins of the Jews in general, on account of which God had subjected them to this long persecution. The brothers looked on their death as a sacrifice for the sins of the people, and hoped that it would turn God’s anger from the Jews, and that He would be gracious to them, and put an end to this persecution.

II. Commentary.

Fortitude. It is impossible to extol and admire sufficiently the unshaken fortitude of the seven brothers. It was comparatively easy for the aged Eleazar to give up his life, for under no circumstances could he have had much longer to live, and the world could not offer him much worth having. But the Machabee brothers were young, they could look forward to many years of life, and the world offered them many pleasures and enjoyments. Nevertheless, they freely and valiantly gave up their lives, refusing to be turned from their allegiance to God, either by flattering promises, or horrible tortures.

The mother’s heroism is even more to be admired. She had most to suffer, for in her heart she suffered all her sons’ tortures. She was, in fact, an eight-fold martyr, for she shared in the sufferings of each of her sons, and finally offered up her own life. In truth, the courage of the most valiant of soldiers cannot be compared with the heroism of this woman!

What gives fortitude? What made this mother and her sons so heroically resolved to give up their lives for God’s sake? What enabled them to endure such horrible tortures?

1. *Their firm faith* in God and His revelation. They believed and confessed that

a) God is the Almighty Lord and Creator of the world: “These hands I have from heaven”—“The King of this world will raise us up”—“God made all these things out of nothing.”

b) That God is just, rewarding the good and punishing the wicked: "We suffer thus for our sins"—"Thou, O most wicked of men, shalt not escape the judgment of Almighty God"—"Receive death, that in that mercy I may receive thee again."

c) That there is an eternal life, a resurrection of the body, and a meeting again in another world: "The King of this world will raise us up in the resurrection of eternal life"—"These hands I have from heaven . . . I hope to receive them again from Him"—"That I may receive thee again with thy brethren." They raised their eyes beyond the perishable things of this earth, to those things which are heavenly and eternal; and they looked to being rewarded by God in another world. They gave up their earthly life, in order to gain eternal life.

From their firm faith proceeded a great fear and love of God: "We are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of God."

2. Because they believed in the promises of God, *they believed in the future Redeemer*; and, on account of this faith, God assisted them by His grace, without which no one can keep the commandments.

Unlawful obedience. The example of these holy martyrs teaches us that we must not obey our superiors when they command us to do anything which God has forbidden, or when they forbid anything which God has commanded. In such cases we must say, as did the Machabee brothers: "The law of God forbids it; we will not do it."

The commandment of abstinence. The seven Machabees died martyrs for obedience to God's commandments. They preferred to suffer the most cruel tortures rather than transgress the commandment not to touch swine's flesh. Jesus Christ, through his Church, has given us a similar law in the Third Commandment of the Church.

The duty of parents in the education of their children. Parents should learn from the mother of the Machabees to bring up their children in the fear and love of God, and to care for their souls more than for anything else, so that they may look to meeting them again in eternal life. "What doth it profit a man if he gain the whole world and suffer the loss of his own soul!"

Commemoration of the holy Machabees. The Church commemorates these martyrs on August 1th: "For," says St. Gregory Nazianzen," what would not these men, who suffered martyrdom before Christ suffered, have endured if they had been called to suffer persecution after His Incarnation, and had present before their eyes the Death which He suffered for our salvation! Yes, I think I may assume in union with all friends of God, that there was a certain mysterious communion between the martyrs of the Old Testament and Jesus Christ, without belief in Whom none of those martyrs before the Incarnation could have attained to such a glorious end."

III. Application.

Put yourself in the place of the youngest brother, and imagine the king speaking to you, making you splendid promises on the one hand, and, on the other, threatening you with death by torture. Would you remain firm, and suffer a lingering martyrdom rather than offend God by committing a grievous sin? "We will rather die than transgress God's law" had been the maxim of these brothers' lives from their earliest youth, so that, when they found themselves assailed by a severe temptation, they remained firm. Let the same maxim be stamped on your heart! Abide by this principle in little things, and then, by God's grace, you will stand firm in the hour of trial. "Lead us not into temptation!"

CHAPTER LXXXV.

VALIANT EXPLOITS OF JUDAS MACHABEUS (160 B. C.).

I. Narrative and Explanation.

AT the time when Antiochus was thus cruelly persecuting the Jews, there was in Judea a priest named Mathathias¹, who had five sons. This zealous priest, having learnt that Antiochus had profaned the Temple, and nearly destroyed the worship of the true God, was filled with the deepest sorrow. He knew that the wicked king would soon succeed in his impious designs, if the Jews did not offer a vigorous resistance.

He, therefore, called upon all who had any zeal for the laws of God to rise up with him, in defence of their sacred

rights. Then he and his sons fled to the mountains where they were soon joined by the valiant men of Israel, and quickly formed a powerful army. They destroyed the altars² of the false gods, bravely defended the law of the Lord, and compelled the apostate Jews to leave the country.

After the death of Mathathias³, Judas, surnamed Machabeus, or the Hammerer⁴, on account of his invincible courage and great valour, assumed the command of the Jewish army. In battle he showed himself brave as a lion—had several engagements with the Syrian generals, and recovered Jerusalem and the Temple. With a sorrowful heart he saw the Temple in its desecrated and desolate state, the altar profaned, and the grass growing in the deserted courts.

He then purified the Temple⁵, celebrated his victory by a grand festival, and dedicated the altar anew, with the sound of harps, and lutes, and cymbals, and hymns of joy in the sight of the wondering multitude.

¹ The severe test of conscience put by Antiochus forced the faithful Jews into resistance. The priest Mathathias and his sons placed themselves at the head of those who were resolved to fight for their religion. — ² which Antiochus had set up all over the country. — ³ 166 B. C. — ⁴ because he overcame, or so to speak, hammered down the enemies of the Jews. — ⁵ It had been polluted, made desolate and desecrated by the erecting in it of altars to the false gods (Chapt. LXXXIII). The purification consisted in the removing of everything unholy and pagan which had served for the worship of false gods.

Antiochus, hearing of the splendid victories of Judas Machabeus, was roused to fury, and, hastening to assume the command of his army, set out at once for Jerusalem⁶. But driving at full speed in his war-chariot, he was thrown to the ground and grievously wounded⁷. Soon worms came forth from the body of that impious king; the flesh rotted on his bones, and he became an object of horror and disgust, so that no one could approach him. He who so lately thought that the very stars of heaven should obey him, was deserted even by his slaves.

Then, seeing the folly and wickedness of his pride, he began to humble himself before the Lord⁸, promising to repair all the evil he had done⁹ and to proclaim through-



out the whole earth that there was no god but the great God Whom the Jews adored. But, inasmuch as his repentance proceeded only from the fear of death, and the dread of temporal punishment, it was of no avail before God. His sufferings continued unabated, and at last the wicked king, the blasphemer of God, the oppressor of His people, died in torment, the death of a reprobate¹⁰.

⁶ It was after he had suffered a defeat in Persia, that he learnt that the Jews had gathered together to fight for the exercise of their religion. He determined to vent the anger he felt at his defeat in Persia on the little Jewish state. He intended to attack Jerusalem and "make it a common burying place of the Jews" i. e. destroy the city and bury its inhabitants under its ruins. — ⁷ so that he had to be carried in a litter, and could advance but slowly. — ⁸ Holy Scripture says (2 Mach. 9, 12): "When he could not abide his own stench, he spoke thus: 'It is just to be subject to God, and that a mortal man should not equal himself to God.'" His pride had been so great that he would acknowledge no God, and, out of hatred for Him, inhumanly oppressed His people. — ⁹ He promised to guarantee freedom of worship to the Jews; even to become a Jew himself, and

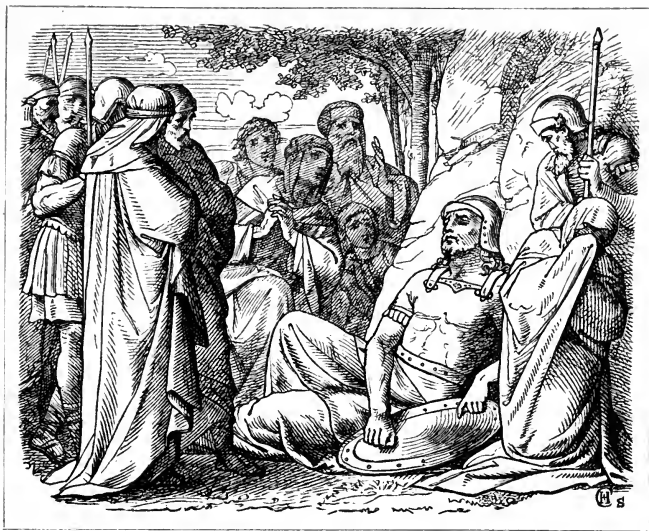
wander through the world proclaiming God's power (2 Mach. 9, 17). He promised a great deal, as is the way with those whose word is not to be depended on; but God, Who sees the heart, would not hearken to him, because his promises were not sincere, and because God foreknew that he would not keep them. — ¹⁰ The punishment foretold to their cruel persecutor by the Machabee brothers had not failed to overtake him. In the story as narrated in last chapter, only the threat of the youngest brother is related; but the fourth, fifth and sixth brothers had also foretold the judgments of God. The fourth brother had said: "As to thee, thou shalt have no resurrection to life." The fifth had said: "Thou shalt see God's great power, in what manner He will torment thee and thy seed." And the sixth, when dying, had cried out: "Do not think that thou shalt escape punishment, for that thou hast attempted to fight against God."

The son and successor of Antiochus sent his ablest generals, with mighty armies ¹¹, to take Judea and Jerusalem again. Judas Machabeus and his small army, seeing the hosts ¹² that were marching against him, had recourse to God in humble prayer. Then they took up their arms and advanced to meet the enemy, trusting in God alone.

In the midst of the combat five horsemen ¹³, in shining armour, were seen by the enemy in the air above, fighting for the Jews. Two of these heavenly warriors were with Judas Machabeus, as it were shielding him from danger, while the other three cast darts from on high against the Syrian host ¹⁴. Seeing this strange sight the enemy were seized with terror, and fled in confusion, leaving thirty thousand of their number dead on the field.

Thus favoured by divine assistance, Judas Machabeus defeated the Syrians in many other bloody engagements. But it happened in one of these that some of the Jews were slain, and on the following day, when Judas and his soldiers came to bury them, they found under their tunics certain heathen charms, or amulets, which it was not allowable even to touch.

It became manifest to all that it was because of the amulets, that these men had been killed ¹⁵; and, praising the justice of God, they besought Him to pardon the sins of the unhappy dead. But Judas collected a sum of twelve thousand drachms of silver, and sent it to Jerusalem to



have sacrifices offered for his soldiers who had thus fallen in battle. "It is, therefore," says the Scripture, "a holy and a wholesome thought to pray for the dead, that they may be loosed from their sins".

¹¹ The Syrian kings had allied themselves to several neighbouring people, namely the Edomites or Idumaeans, who had taken possession of the southern portion of Judea; the Ammonites on the east, who had increased in power since the fall of the kingdom of Israel; and the Arabs on the south-east. — ¹² gathered together by the Ammonite general Timotheus (2 Mach. 10, 24): "Timotheus having called together a multitude of foreign troops, and assembled horsemen out of Asia". Before Judas and his soldiers went to meet the Greek army, they, clothed in sackcloth, threw themselves down before the altar of the Lord and prayed for help (2 Mach. 10, 25 &c.). — ¹³ angels in the form of horsemen. — ¹⁴ These were so dazzled and terrified that they took to flight. More than 20,000 men were killed. — ¹⁵ They had kept back from the booty some charms of the false gods, though the law (Deut. 7, 25) commanded the destruction of every thing that had served for the worship of idols.

Before one of the many battles which Judas fought, he had a vision. He saw the deceased High Priest, Onias¹⁶, holding up his hands, and praying for the Jewish people.

After this another man appeared, surrounded with great glory. Onias said: "This is he that prayeth much for the people, and for all the holy city, Jeremias, the prophet of God." Then Jeremias gave Judas a sword of gold, saying: "Take this holy sword, a gift from God, wherewith thou shalt overcome the adversaries of My people Israel."

Judas, encouraged by these heavenly favours, gained many battles. At last it happened that he engaged the enemy with very unequal numbers¹⁷. In this battle he was vanquished and slain¹⁸. Then all the people mourned him for many days, saying: "How is the mighty man fallen that saved the people of Israel!" That Judas sent money to Jerusalem, wherewith sacrifices might be offered for the repose of the dead, is a sign that the Jews also believed in purgatory. For, if the prayers of the living brought no relief to the dead, neither would Judas have collected money for sacrifices, nor would the priests have accepted it for that purpose. Besides, we learn from this chapter of the Bible that the saints pray for their friends on earth, and that their prayers are heard.

¹⁶ This faithful servant of God had been killed by an assassin, 170 B. C. Judas had personally known the zealous High Priest. —

¹⁷ Bacchides, the Syrian general, was at the head of an army of 25,000 men, which Judas opposed with only 800. His followers urged him to retreat, but he replied: "God forbid we should do this thing and flee away from them. But if our time (i. e. the hour of our death) be come, let us die manfully for our brethren, and let us not stain our glory." — ¹⁸ He died for the cause of liberty and the free exercise of religion.

II. Commentary.

The Justice of God is very clearly revealed in the account of the death of Antiochus. The wicked king had deliberately prepared tortures for the Jewish martyrs, and now he himself was slowly tortured to death. His body while still alive became corrupt, and he was unbearable both to himself and to those about him. In his arrogance he had despised God and forbidden His worship; now he had to bow down under the hand of the Almighty, and acknowledge that his terrible sufferings were but the just punishment of his pride and

cruelty to God's servants. He even prayed and made vows to God, knowing that it was only from Him that help could come; but his prayer was not heard, and he died a miserable death, in unendurable agony. Contemplate the once proud king on his death-bed. His flatterers have forsaken him; his servants cannot endure to be near him. Day and night he is tormented; day and night he complains and laments—but there is no help for him! In the days of his health he had tormented many, and now, he himself is tormented by bodily pain and remorse of conscience, “and indeed very justly, seeing he had tormented the bowels of others with many and new torments”. Let this story teach you to know and fear the justice of God. “It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God” (Hebr. 10, 31). Another instance of God's justice is given in the death of the Jewish soldiers. Judas Machabeus was convinced that the reason of their death lay in their secreting the idolatrous amulets; for he believed that God, on account of their sin, had withdrawn His protection from them, and punished them by death.

Repentance must be supernatural. Why did not Antiochus obtain mercy? Because he was not truly penitent. It is true that he did repent of his offences against God's people, but his repentance was natural, not supernatural, and sprang not from fear or love of God, but from horror of his temporal punishment (i. e. his fearful disease), and from terror of approaching death. He wished to be well again, and to live and reign longer; this was the only reason why he repented of his cruelty. Such is not supernatural repentance. It is true that he also made good resolutions, but these were of no value in the sight of God, for they were as little supernatural as his repentance. It is only supernatural repentance, and supernatural purposes of amendment which make a man truly penitent; and, not possessing these, Antiochus failed to obtain pardon, and died impenitent. As he lived, so he died. “The death of the wicked is very evil” (Ps. 33, 22).

Deathbed-conversions. For the same reasons that the conversion of Antiochus was not real or sincere, most deathbed-conversions are

very doubtful and untrustworthy, since, as a rule, they do not proceed from supernatural motives, but only from fear of death. Therefore, sinners should never put off repentance till they are near death; because, firstly, they might be called away suddenly without any preparatory illness; and, secondly, it is very difficult for a sinner to be sincerely converted on his deathbed after a long life spent in resisting grace, and heaping sin upon sin. "Delay not to be converted to the Lord, and defer it not from day to day. For His wrath shall come on a sudden, and in the time of vengeance He will destroy thee" (Ecclus. 5, 7. 8).

The immortality of the soul. Judas and his companions believed that the souls of those who had died still lived, and, therefore, they prayed for them.

Purgatory. The Machabees and their followers believed that those who fell were not eternally lost in hell, seeing that they had fought and died for God's honour. But, on the other hand, they did not believe that their fallen brethren were with the blessed in Limbo, for otherwise their sin-offerings for them would have had no meaning. No, they believed: a) that those who had been slain were in a middle state between that of the blessed and that of the damned; b) that they had to make satisfaction for venial sin; and c) that the survivors could help them by prayers and sacrifices, and thus make satisfaction for them to the divine justice, so that they might be delivered from their present state. Holy Scripture testifies that this belief is a correct one, since it praises Judas for offering up these prayers and sacrifices, saying explicitly: "It is a holy and wholesome thought to pray for the dead." This completely corroborates the Catholic doctrine of purgatory, and of prayers for the dead.

Prayers for the dead. It is a "holy" thought to pray for the dead, because it proceeds from a living faith and a sincere brotherly love. It is also a "wholesome" thought, for these prayers help the holy souls as well as ourselves. They procure for them admission to heaven, and they increase our merits and, moreover, bind the delivered souls, out of gratitude, to intercede for us before the throne of God. This leads us on to another Catholic doctrine, also confirmed by this story, namely:

The intercession of the saints. In Judas's vision not only did Onias pray for the Jews, but he said that Jeremias also prayed for them ("This is he that prayeth much for the people, and for all the holy city, Jeremias, the prophet of God"). The saints, therefore, know about us and care for us, for our sufferings, struggles and necessities; and seek to help us by their intercession. Jeremias appeared as the special guardian and patron of Jerusalem. In the same way we believe that those saints who have been chosen, and devoutly venerated, as the special patrons of individual Christians, or of churches, villages, towns, parishes or estates, intercede especially for those who have been committed to their care.

The virtues of the Machabees. Mathathias and his sons fought a noble fight. They did not take up arms out of ambition or thirst for renown, but simply out of holy zeal for God's honour, for liberty of conscience and the welfare of their country. They said: "It is better for us to die in battle, than to see the evils of our nation and of the holies." They were ready to bleed and die for God and for their country. They carried on the war with heroic courage and endurance, and their heroism proceeded from their unshaken confidence in God. They fought not only *for* God, but *with* Him. They knew that they could not overcome without His help, so before the battle, and in the battle, they called on Him, and after the battle, they humbly gave Him the glory, and thanked Him who had given them the victory.

The power of prayer. The wonderful assistance which was so repeatedly granted to Judas, shows us the power of fervent and trustful prayer, and should encourage us to turn to God in all our necessities. Almighty God gave the victory to the faithful Jews, because "they fought with their hands, and prayed in their hearts."

The soldiers of Christ. We all have a holy war to wage for God's glory and the salvation of our souls, namely, the war against our own passions and inclinations, as also against temptations from without, from unbelieving and wicked men, and from the evil spirits. In this war our weapons are the sword of God's word, the shield of faith, and the lance of prayer. Our companions in arms are our holy guardian

angels who invisibly help us during the strife in the same way that they visibly helped Judas. We are consecrated to, and strengthened for this war by the Sacrament of Confirmation.

III. Application.

Of what kind is your repentance and your purpose of amendment? Have you always carried out your good resolutions? In order to have a hatred of sin you ought every evening to try to excite in yourself a feeling of contrition.

Do you properly venerate your guardian angel and your patron saint? Have you read your saint's life? Do you commend yourself every day to his care, and try to imitate his virtues?

Do you pray diligently for the dead, especially for your relations and benefactors? Never neglect to do this, for it is a duty of love, and obtains merit for yourself. Especially, remember the holy souls at Mass, after the Elevation. If even the sacrifices of the Old Testament, which were only shadows and types, could help the dead, how much greater must be the help which is afforded to them by the Most Holy Sacrifice of the New Testament.

CHAPTER LXXXVI.

THE LAST TIMES BEFORE CHRIST.

I. Narrative and Explanation.

AFTER the death of Judas Machabeus, his brothers, Jonathan and Simon, successively placed themselves at the head of the Jewish people¹, and performed wonderful exploits. Their successors, however, fell away from God, and brought the people, always unsteady and prone to evil, into a multitude of sins and vices. They, indeed, still worshipped the true God², but it was only with their lips, and their hearts were far from Him³.

Their chief care consisted in the outward observance of the law; the inward disposition and purity of heart they neglected. Whatever good there might be among the Jews was stifled by the sect of the hypocritical Pharisees, or of the unbelieving Sadducees, and these two sects, although

mortal enemies of each other⁴, exercised a great power over the people. Throughout the rest of the world idolatry reigned supreme, and all the nations of the earth were sunk in misery and corruption⁵.

¹ Jonathan was treacherously murdered by the Syrians, 143 B. C. After his death his brother Simon was chosen to be both High Priest and leader of the people. He succeeded in entirely freeing the Jewish state from the dominion of the Syrian king, Demetrius, 142 B. C. Out of gratitude, the Jews made the dignities of prince and High Priest hereditary in the family of Simon. — ² They had done so ever since the return from the captivity, and had been further confirmed in the true worship since the days of Judas Machabeus. — ³ They had no fear or love of God in their hearts. In consequence, immorality gained such ground, that a Jewish writer, Josephus Flavius, has called Jerusalem a second Sodom. — ⁴ The Pharisees introduced many human doctrines and precepts, and attached almost more importance to these than to the law of God. They sought justice in such outward observances as the washing of hands and of vessels, and the repetition of prayers, and they neglected purity of heart. They were, for the most part, full of pride, avarice, envy and hypocrisy. The Sadducees were freethinkers and materialists. They did not believe in the immortality of the soul or in the resurrection of the body, so that they had no thought of eternal life, but sought their heaven in this world. They led a bad and dissolute life, having no fear of God. This sect found most of its adherents among the rich (see "The rich man" New Test. XLVI). — ⁵ Pagan Rome had by degrees subjected to her rule nearly all the then known world, so that the nations of the world formed one vast empire, of which Rome was the capital, and the Roman emperor the sovereign. At the time of our Lord's Incarnation all manner of idolatry, unbelief, superstition, and an unbounded immorality reigned throughout this pagan empire. Rome alone possessed 30,000 deities many of whom were honoured solely on account of their immorality. The largest portion of the population groaned in a miserable state of slavery. Corruption was so universal that all thinking men felt there was no deliverance from it possible, unless help were sent from heaven.

The few just men who were scattered here and there among the different races of men⁶, sighed for the coming of the promised Redeemer, the only hope of fallen man. They prayed that the clouds might rain down the Just One, and that the earth might bud forth the Saviour.

All was in readiness for the coming of our Lord, which event, according to signs and prophecies, must be near at hand.

Four hundred years before the Birth of Christ, Malachias, the last of the prophets, could not restrain his joy at the near approach of the Messiah. He told the Jewish priests that the Temple should soon be closed for ever, and the fires on their altars extinguished, for that their offerings had ceased to be pleasing to the Lord of Hosts. He said: "I have no pleasure in you, saith the Lord of Hosts, and I will not receive a gift of your hand. For from the rising of the sun even to the going down, My name is great among the gentiles, and in every place there is sacrifice, and there is offered to My name a clean oblation. For My name is great among the gentiles, saith the Lord of Hosts." The clean oblation of which the prophet Malachias speaks, is the Holy Sacrifice of the Mass which is offered every day and in many places, from the rising of the sun to the going down thereof⁷.

⁶ By means of the captivity of Babylon many Jewish colonies had been formed in the midst of the pagans, which continued to exist in the Christian era. After the division of the empire of Alexander the Great these colonies spread themselves into Egypt, Asia Minor and Greece, and by force of the Jewish spirit of commercial enterprise gradually extended themselves over the whole Roman empire, as far as Spain and the south of France. There was a very large colony of Jews at Rome at the time of the Incarnation, for we hear of the emperor Augustus receiving a deputation of eight thousand of them. Wherever they settled down, these Jews built synagogues and houses of prayer, and through them the pagans got to know the Unseen and Living God, and the prophecies about the Messiah; and many of them even adopted the Jewish religion. — ⁷ See Commentary, Chapt. LXXXII.

Nothing remained to be accomplished save the prophecy of Jacob to his son Juda⁸. This last sign was not delayed. The Jewish people, torn and weakened by continual dissensions among themselves, called in the Romans to decide their quarrels, and the Romans, a great and powerful nation, settled the dispute by taking possession of all Judea⁹, and placing on its throne Herod, a stranger¹⁰, a satellite of the Roman emperor¹¹. Thus was the sceptre of Juda broken¹², and that event ushered in the Redeemer of the world¹³. Herod reigned in Judea when the Messiah, so long promised,

appeared on earth in human form, even Christ the Lord, to Whom be honour and glory for ever and ever.

⁸ See Chapt. XXVII. — ⁹ Under the general Pompey. — ¹⁰ an Idumaean. — ¹¹ To assure himself of the government, Herod slew all the descendants of the Machabees, among others his own wife Mariamne, and the two sons whom he had had by her. Moreover, he oppressed the Jews with heavy taxes. — ¹² Though the Jews had a ruler, he was a foreigner, and therefore the time had now come for the Advent of the Saviour, the "Expected of all nations". — ¹³ The prophet Isaias thus expressed the longing of Israel for the Redeemer: "Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the Just; let the earth be opened, and bud forth a Saviour", i. e. "as the dew falls from heaven, so may the Most Just (the Redeemer) descend from heaven; and as the earth brings forth plants, so in like manner may the Saviour be brought forth". The hope and longing for the Redeemer was expressed by the Jews in the daily prayers recited in the synagogues, in which was to be found the following petition: "Build up Jerusalem for ever, and raise up David's throne in the midst. Let the seed of David, Thy servant, bud forth speedily, for we hope continuously for Thy redemption." We can see in the case of Simeon, Anna, and those like them (New Test. VII), how very keen had become the expectation of the Messiah in the fulness of time. The conjecture of the Jews that John the Baptist might be the Messiah (New Test. XI) points in the same direction, as also do the words of the woman of Samaria at Jacob's well (New Test. XVI). We know, therefore, that the longing for the Redeemer was very general by the time that He came. However, only very few of the Jews thought of the Messiah as being a Redeemer from sin, and a bringer of grace and truth; they expected, rather, that He would come to deliver them from the dominion of Rome and the tyranny of Herod, to set up the earthly throne of David, enlarge the borders of Judea, and subject all nations to her rule. Even the influential Pharisees regarded a more complete revelation of God as impossible. That the Messiah should be a Saviour of all men, gentiles as well as Jews, was an idea quite inconceivable to their narrow-minded selfishness.

II. Commentary.

A retrospect by which we can recognise God's wisdom in the guidance of mankind:

1. Even in Paradise God revealed Himself to man, and promised a Redeemer. But the greater number of Adam's descendants turned away from God, and sank so low that their reason was obscured, and they lost all power of under-

standing even that natural religion which was taught to them by visible creation, and the voice of their own consciences. Nevertheless, in all pagan religions, there were preserved some remains of the original revelation, such as the memory of a former and happier state, the consciousness of the debt of sin hanging over the human race, the sense of the necessity of reconciliation with an offended God, the dim expectation of a Redeemer, and of a future and better state.

2. God revealed Himself supernaturally to the people of Israel, in order to preserve in them belief in the true God and in the future Redeemer, and through them to spread abroad this belief among the gentiles. However, the inclination towards idolatry was so strong in the chosen people that it was many centuries before God, by repeated revelations and visitations, could wean them from it. Man is very ready to make his own god, that is, to make out God to be such as his own inclinations lead him to wish Him to be. Instead of moulding his own inclinations, will and actions to accord with God's Almighty will, he seeks to accommodate God and His attributes to his own desires. It was not until paganism was eradicated from the religious belief of the Jews, and that the first, Old Testament revelation had become an essential part of their existence, that they were ready for a further and more perfect revelation. Then, and not till then, the world was prepared for the coming of the Only-Begotten of the Father to be its Redeemer.

3. As time went on, the promises concerning the Redeemer became more and more explicit. These promises were conveyed, partly in prophecies, partly by types. Let us then recall the prophecies which have been mentioned: 1. that made to Adam and Eve after the Fall, 2. and 3. made to Abraham, 4. and 5. made through Jacob, 6. through Balaam, 7. through the dying Moses, 8. through David, 9. through Isaias, 10. through Jeremias, 11. through Ezechiel, 12. through Daniel, 13. through Aggeus, 14. through Zacharias, and 15. through Malachias. The people whom we have studied as types of the Messias, are: 1. Adam, 2. Abel, 3. Noe, 4. Melchisedech, 5. Isaac, 6. Joseph, 7. Job, 8. Moses, 9. Josue,

10. Gedeon, 11. Samson, 12. David, 13. Solomon, 14. Elias, and 15. Jonas. The objects to which our attention has been directed as types, are: the Tree of Life; the sacrifice of Melchisedech; the paschal lamb; the manna; the sacrifices of the Old Law; the brazen serpent &c. The prophecy uttered by Malachias was the last one vouchsafed, because, from that time forward, the Jews, being confirmed in their own faith, were employed by God to spread His revelation among the gentiles.

4. The pagan world was on the brink of an abyss. It had learnt by its own experience what man comes to, when he has forsaken God. The ancient world had made great progress in the arts and sciences, but it found no satisfaction in them, because its moral and social condition was deplorable. The truth, which raises man, and delivers him from all uncertainty, was lacking to this world which had cast off its God. Its best and most learned men were fully aware of the folly of paganism, but this conviction only led them to doubt everything; as we can, for example, see by Pilate's question: "What is truth?" This state of doubt did not help them to arrive at truth, for truth can only be found in God. Moreover, grace was wanting to them,—that grace which enables man to will and do what is right, which puts an end to the disorders of human nature, and brings peace to the restless heart of man. When the pagan world at length saw what was lacking to it, and that no help could come to it except from heaven, then it was that God dispersed the Jews into all parts of the world, and by their means spread abroad the knowledge of the living and true God, and the hope of the Redeemer. Thus, four thousand years after the Fall, a large portion of the pagan world had begun to long for the Saviour who was expected in Judea.

Now, "when the fulness of time was come, God sent His Son that we might receive the adoption of sons" (Gal. 4, 4). "The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, and we saw His glory, the glory as it were of the Only-Begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1, 14).

The signification of Advent. This season ought to make us think of the sad condition of the world before our Lord's Incarnation, and prepare ourselves, by penance and a longing desire, for the Birth of Christ in our hearts.

The two natures of the Redeemer. The passage: "Drop down dew, ye heavens, from above, and let the clouds rain the Just; let the earth be opened, and bud forth a Saviour", which occurs in Isaias 45, 8, clearly foretells the twofold nature of God made Man. The Divine nature is signified by the prophecy that the Saviour shall come down from heaven (in another passage Isaias cries out: "O that Thou wouldst rend the heavens, and wouldst come down!"); and His Human nature is shown by the prophecy that the earth shall bring Him forth. As God, Jesus Christ came down from heaven, and took His Human nature on earth in the womb of the Immaculate Virgin Mary. Heaven and earth worked together to produce the God made Man, through Whom earth has been reconciled to heaven.

III. Application.

Have you a great desire for the truth which has been revealed to us through Jesus Christ? Do you take great pains to learn all you can about the true doctrines of Christianity? Do you take pleasure in your religious instruction?

Have you a desire that Jesus Christ should come and reign in your heart and dwell therein; or do you look forward to the hour of your first Communion for any less worthy reasons? When you are hearing Mass, make a spiritual Communion, and excite in yourself a longing desire to receive your Divine Saviour. Be sorry for your sins, and pray our Lord to come and dwell spiritually in your heart!

49

51

53

EGYPT and CHANAN.

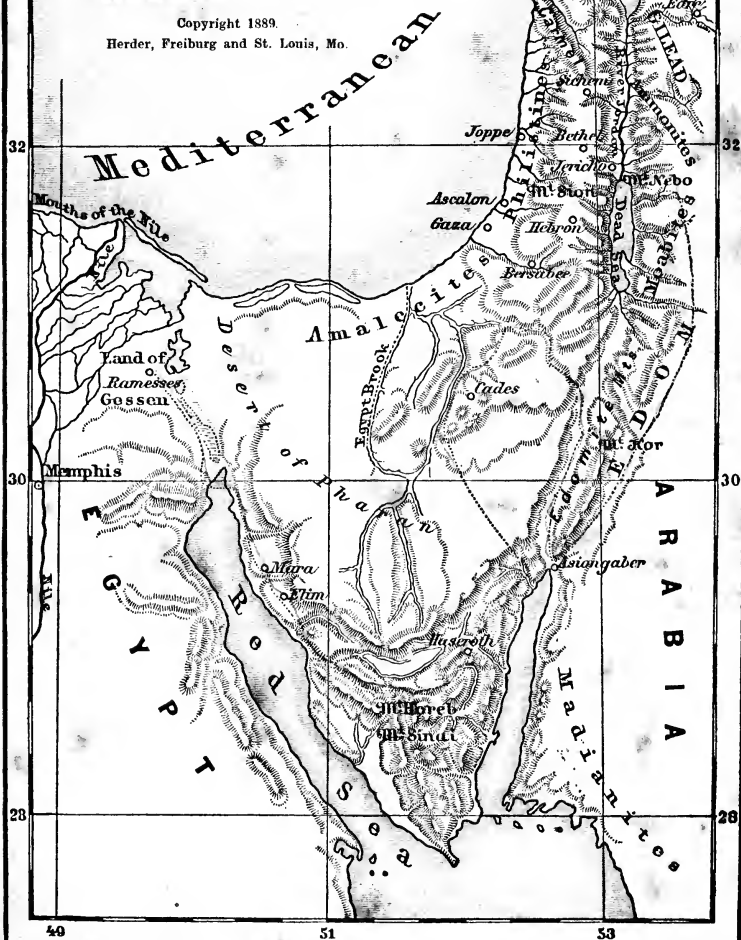
Journey of the Israelites through the Desert.

Scale of Miles

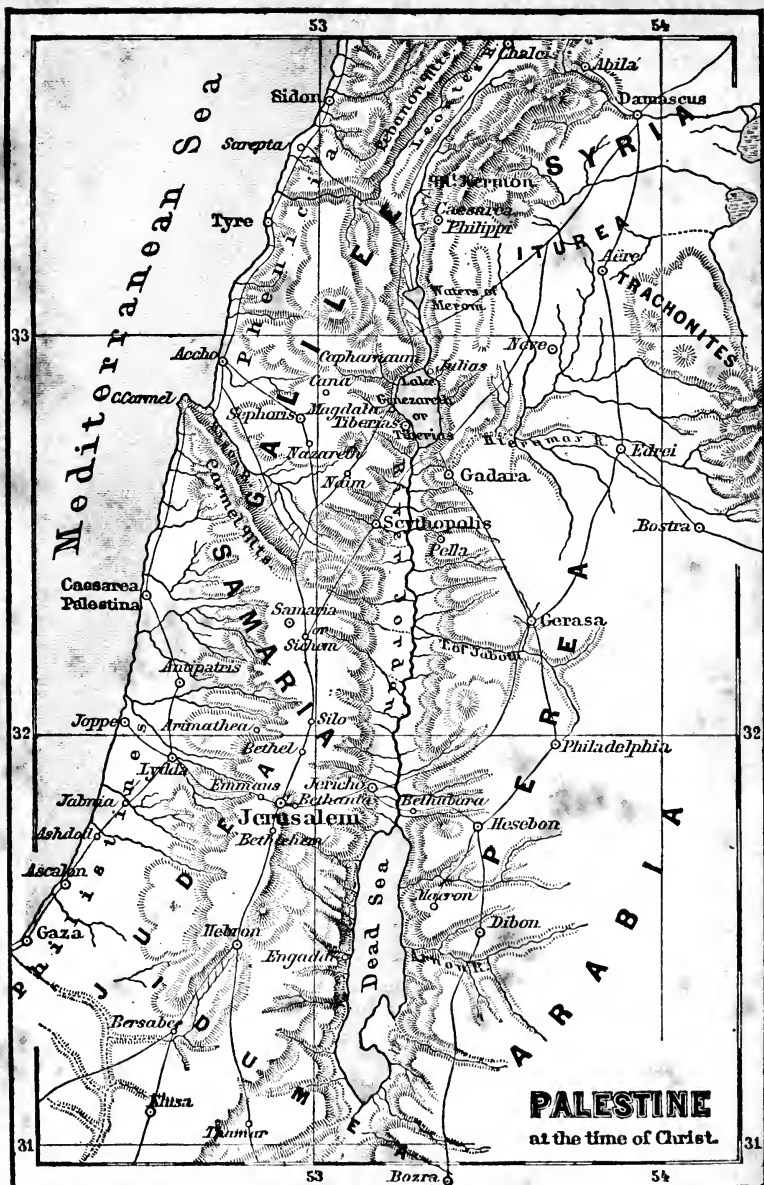


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The blue ——— line indicates the journey of the Israelites



Scale of Miles
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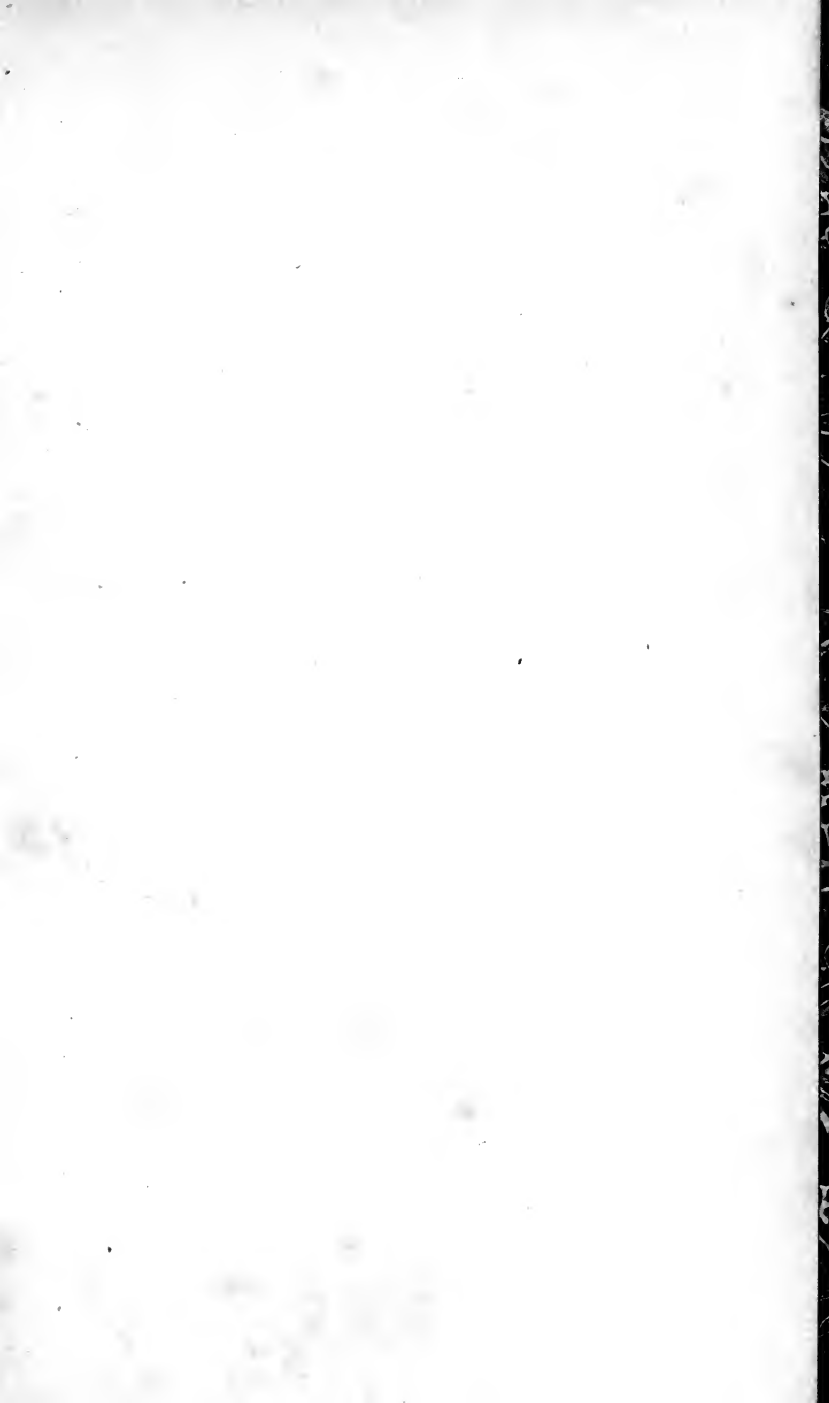
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